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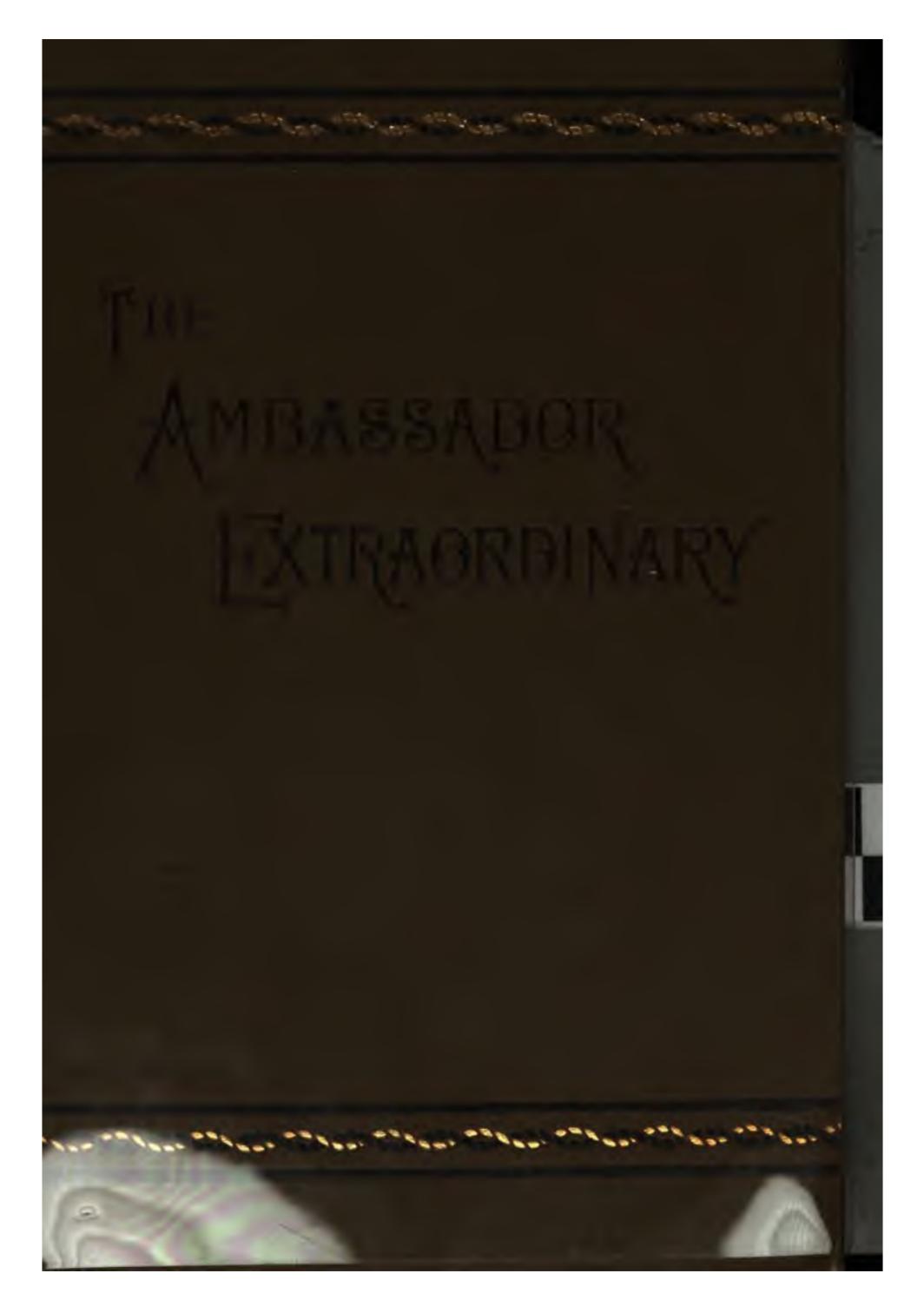
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THE
AMBASSADOR
EXTRAORDINARY

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HIS EXCELLENCY
THE
AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY.

'Thou only bliss . . . that hath survived the Fall !
Thou art the nurse of Virtue; in thine arms
She smiles; appearing—as in truth she is—
Heaven-born ! and destined to the skies again.'

'The wind is high upon the highest hills—
The quiet life is in the vale below :
Who lives at ease, and can content him so,
Is perfect wise.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. III.



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THE
AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY.

CHAPTER I.

THE RESTORATION.

THERE is great joy in the hereditary dominions of the personage whom we have known as his Royal Highness the lodger near the clubs.

The august father and immediate predecessor of his Royal Highness in the right of ruling his Grand Duchy by the Grace of God was, as we remember, expelled from the throne, by rebellious faction, for no particular reason except on account of what is called indecision of character. The times happened to be violent times, and his

Royal Highness was not violent, but very much the reverse. Other Princes, ruling their Peoples as he did by the same Grace of God, were more violent than he, and kept their seats ; he was replaced by a Republic, and eventually, as we know, deceased on account of bad wine.

The Republic has not altogether answered well. The People have become tired of being ruled by each other ; by themselves no people ever yet have been ruled, often as the experiment has been tried. The People have therefore clamoured for their Royal Highness. It has been declared impossible to get on any longer without him. Only let his Royal Highness be restored to the throne of his ancestors, and all will be well. The poor will then have bread to eat, and the rich repose to enjoy. Accordingly, the mob has ‘pronounced ;’ the troops have pronounced ; the assembly has pronounced ; and his Royal Highness is now Sovereign Ruler of his Grand Duchy by the Grace of God.

His Royal Highness, moreover, has been pleased to grant to his People a Constitution.

He is a great admirer of Parliamentary government ; the government of the Ins and the Outs is his ideal. He will have a Senate, therefore, and a Chamber, and a Ministry, and Policemen, and Clubs, and two wheeled cabs, pigeon shooting, and Commissioners of Sewers ; he will have the thing done properly, begad !

Proclamations have consequently been issued, and pasted over waste hoardings and blank walls, announcing that his Royal Highness the Grand Duke will be pleased to make his Solemn Entry into his Capital on such a day, and that all Persons are enjoined to observe certain Regulations, and may his Royal Highness the Grand Duke—Live ! And the better to show that a Constitution has been granted, and after what model, God Save his Royal Highness !

Possibly his Excellency the Viscount Malign, working unweariedly at Mount Medusa, may have had something to do with all this. Possibly the Right Reverend Monsignore Saint-Paul, prelatie Chaplain of the Palace of the Vatican, may have had a good deal to do with it. At all events, it is known

for certain that powerful influence from abroad has been brought to bear upon his Royal Highness's restoration, and that a great ecclesiastic has made himself in a manner a personal security for the behaviour of his Royal Highness in society—that is to say, his private character—a point upon which some of the leading republicans had been rude enough, or shrewd enough, to require such guarantees as could conveniently be had.

What return such a personage as His Excellency Viscount Malign might expect for this exercise of influence, in a world where favour is chiefly granted in expectation of some return, the rude and shrewd leading republicans had not perhaps altogether forgotten to consider; but it is not for us to inquire into what they may possibly have failed to discern. The return which the great ecclesiastic would expect they could estimate clearly enough, inasmuch as all ecclesiastics, from the foundation of the world, had in their opinion been pretty much the same when opportunity offered; but one thing the leading republicans determined upon was this—that any pretensions which this great

ecclesiastic might happen to prefer in his Royal Highness's dominions at any future time should as matter of prudence be thwarted on principle.

CHAPTER II.

THE GRAND DUKE ENTERS HIS CAPITAL.

BEHOLD, then, the day arrived when his Royal Highness the Grand Duke is to make his Solemn Entry into his Capital! The sun shines in splendour. The crisp air of springtime is stimulating to every sense. The High Street of the Capital, and the market-place, are gay with decorations—flowers and wreaths and flags innumerable. The booths have been removed, and the donkey carts are at home. The footways, where there are any, are covered with rejoicing people, clad in their choicest attire. The carriageway is sprinkled with golden sand. The balconies are hung with cloth, and filled with ladies, any one of whom the Grand Duke, [being a bachelor, may haply be pleased to take a fancy to; they all have

handkerchiefs to wave. The artillery, three of them alternately, have been exploding in the market-place every few minutes since dawn. The troops—those who sustain the State on foot—line the High Street at regular intervals of so many yards, determined by the strictest arithmetical computation lest they should run short. Officers strut up and down, as many as ten or a dozen in number, to see that all goes right with their warriors. The cavalry, and the mounted commanders of the foot, are away in attendance upon advancing Royalty. The hours wear on.

At length all the cannon go off at once! For Royalty has, by the Grace of God, arrived in sight of the market-place and the cannoneers. The shock of the discharge makes all the people jump; and the ladies are almost in danger of falling topsy-turvy from their balconies, partly through feeling alarm at the noise, partly through straining over the railings to catch an early glimpse of the Lord's Anointed, and partly, in some lively instances, through a possible idea of becoming more distinguished by the misadventure than

hurt by the fall. A procession of clergy in the richest of robes issues from the cathedral at the end of the High Street, and soon becomes a stately spread-eagle galaxy of clergy displayed for the act of benediction before the great door. The organ is pealing within. The bells are ringing without. Private musketry would no doubt lend its independent aid; but the lieges have been wisely disarmed long ago, and only a few boys throw crackers, rebuked by their elders, and occasionally boxed on their ears. The sparrows are carelessly hopping about and dusting themselves in the unwonted sand; the pigeons from the cathedral, frightened by the ordnance and the bells, are careering overhead like a little cloud of spangled meteors.

In the midst of this jubilant to-do, his Royal Highness the Grand Duke appears. He is attired as a Field Marshal of his own army. He wears on his royal bosom all his own orders, and some of other people's that have been bestowed upon him within the last week or two. He rides a charger, very much harnessed, and fit to carry him through

campaigns, if, by the Grace of God, he should have to achieve greatness by such violent means. He rides with head uncovered, in homage to that public supremacy which he has created by his Constitution. He carries in his hand a cocked hat with a great deal of feather. To give him all his due, he is every inch a prince this morning, if a proud bearing, high spirits, good health, and several glasses of brandy, are to count for what they ought.

He is followed by the High Officers of State, all mounted more or less uncomfortably on chargers, and all dressed in gorgeous clothes; and he is escorted by the Royal Cavalry, as many as six being on each side of him, with a vedette in front, and a rearguard behind, and the general in supreme command caracoling at one side. The troops present arms one by one.

His Royal Highness bows gallantly to the ladies in the balconies, who wave their handkerchiefs, and even—some of the boldest—cast flowers over him. The men in the street utter feeble cries of welcome.

The artillery, having been again loaded, is again discharged in a prodigiously successful

salvo, shaking a great many people almost out of their seven senses, less fortunately shaking two or three of the High Officers of State almost entirely out of their saddles. The sparrows, who care for none of these things, take reluctantly to the wing as the cavalcade disturbs them on the ground, and chirp to each other vociferously from the housetops as the crowd closes thinly in behind to follow to the cathedral, leaving the military stranded in solitary units all along the way in the rear. The pigeons, greatly scandalised, but hoping it may be over now, alight on the sacred edifice, which is their home, on the heads of saints and other coigns of vantage, and there crane their necks to see the last of these eccentric proceedings.

The bishop and his clergy await his Royal Highness at the sacred door; read a mellifluous address to him; set up a mellifluous chant in his honour; precede him into the church; sing *Te Deum Laudamus* on his account; the bells ringing without, the organ booming within, and the artillery still going off hysterically at intervals to signify the public rejoicing. His Royal Highness kneels

before the altar, and is blessed of the bishop.

The ladies are by this time displayed on suitable galleries within the edifice, and the people at large are massed on the floor. His Royal Highness, although by the movements of his lips he seems to be extremely thirsty, still smiles upon the ladies, and bows to the people at large, and is very regal and very happy.

Escorted to the door and remounted, his Royal Highness proceeds to his palace. The way is down a side lane, and the army has been transferred to this highway and disposed throughout its length—unfortunately at wider intervals than before. The artillery, too, has been galloped to the palace gate. The crowd rearrange themselves along the road; not on footpaths, because there are none, but in a respectful line between the guards.

The cavalcade proceeds to the palace. The troops present arms again, one by one, as royalty goes by. The ordnance thunders from its new position, breaking several windows. The people mildly acclaim. The Prince still carries in his hand his hat and

feathers ; he still bows to his people and smiles to the ladies.

Arrived at his palace, and at length considerably left to himself by the High Officers of State, his Royal Highness signifies his desire immediately to drink soda-water and Burgundy ; which, he having judiciously sent his body-servant in advance, is fortunately ready at hand. How grateful it is to his parched palate let others say, who, endowed with perennial thirst, have suffered from long abstinence like him.

CHAPTER III.

H. R. H. MUST MARRY.

To inquire further into the private life of the Prince thus happily restored to the embrace of an enraptured nation is unnecessary for the present. Suffice it to say that he is soon discovered to be an admirable ruler. He is not one of that stubbornly-virtuous class of governors by God's grace whose very virtues lean to vice's side. Give him his cigar and his Burgundy, and let both be of acceptable brand, and he is content. The Government, begad! he leaves to his Ministers. When they say sign, he signs. The People find it mightily convenient to have no more intrigues for supreme power; a happy-go-lucky Prince is the greatest gift of God.

But there is one thing wanting to the happiness, so nearly perfect bliss, of his

Royal Highness's People. His Royal Highness is unmarried. The High Officers of State, prompted probably by their wives, come to the rational conclusion without delay that this ought no longer to be. His Royal Highness concurs, as he always does, with the advice of his responsible advisers. Of course he will marry. But whom shall it be?

'It must be,' say the High Officers of State, 'some illustrious lady, sufficiently illustrious to be placed at the head of his Royal Highness's Court. It is observed, however, that his Royal Highness winces a little—a very little, but visibly—as the details of the project are developed before him in Council. But this is scarcely wondered at, because each High Officer of State, prompted by his wife, has a separate candidate in view for the honour of being placed at the head of his Royal Highness's Court. The matter, therefore, becomes one for careful consideration.

Following his Royal Highness, as we are privileged to do, from the Council Board of State to the chamber of private reflection, we

discover that the Prince, strange as it may appear, already loves. He has not been fascinated by the glances of the ladies in the balconies of his capital; this could not be allowed: neither has his fancy been attracted by the many reports that have reached him of the charms of all kinds pertaining to the unbestowed princesses of the world. Many caps have been set at him, of course, or rather headdresses of ostrich feathers, diamonds, false hair, and other exquisite gear, present and absent; but his royal heart does not appear to have been impressed by any of them, and it is our privilege to know the reason why.

In the days of his exile, although a Prince of infinite prudence, as we know, he had been thrown by chance very much into the delightful society of Count Oberon, whom we are acquainted with, and into the still more delightful society of the Count's sister, also of our acquaintance. He was a younger man then, and a little more susceptible to the sweet influence of lovely woman. He was not courted then by many of the very leading possessors of the fine headdresses of the world.

Caps were not, as a rule, set at him at all. If, therefore, one cap was set at him, surmounting a very charming face, surmounting in its turn a dooced handsome figure, and always smiling amiably upon him with the approval of what must be honestly called a somewhat kindred spirit, it is not to be wondered at that his heart should have been conquered by such assiduous tenderness. In short he has in secret plighted his princely troth, at a time when it was not worth much in the matrimonial market, to the Countess Titania. He may have no doubt done a good many other things of a similar sort from time to time under various casual influences—turning chiefly upon Burgundy—but he has committed himself thereby as little as any man; whereas to the charming Countess Titania, under no such casual influence, but a permanent one, he has committed himself altogether. Each party to the contract reserving a good many rights of free intercourse all the while, it has been quite understood between them that the time might come when it would be convenient to both to devote themselves, after the highly fashionable

manner of such fine people, to each other. The rights reserved by the Prince were, as may have been guessed, capable of a much more liberal interpretation than those reserved by the lady ; but with both of them matters of detail would be of less moment than with less fine and fashionable people who know so much less of the world they live in.

It is true that upon the announcement of his recall to the dignity of his throne, the Countess has not, as a less refined woman might do, claimed even in secret his special attention. The Countess would be much too judicious for that ; her tact is as perfect as her beauty and grace. But if not a word out of the ordinary current of their accustomed conversation has been spoken between them, it is because no such word was necessary ; it is because any such word would have been injudicious. Imagine the Countess Titania rushing at him with the joyful exclamation, ‘ My dear Prince, now we shall be married ! ’ Imagine the dear Prince clasping the beloved form to his ardent bosom with the wild response, ‘ Yes, darling, now we shall be married ! ’ It is impossible to imagine any-

thing of the kind ; quite impossible in dealing with fashionable people ; they perfectly understand each other. Time is of no particular moment—in no way of the essence of the transaction—but the Prince and the pretty Countess perfectly understand each other ; nor is it likely they would let all the world know it.

His Royal Highness, consequently, having acquired notions of his own concerning lovely woman ; and being in sober truth as honestly attached to the pretty Countess as if he were for instance a clown, not drinking Burgundy but Beer ; being at the same time in no way in any hurry—always, indeed, averse to precipitation, and particularly averse to it now ; it is not surprising, surely, that he should wince when his Councillors of State thus considerately propose that he should in a manner toss up a florin forthwith, for the choice, from amongst a round dozen of unknown if illustrious personages, of one of them to be his Royal Consort.

Not that his Royal Highness is altogether fastidious. Moreover, it is the privilege of exalted society that even the most inexpedient

fastidiousness can always be accommodated if it must. But the fact is, says this exemplary Prince to himself (wishing he had the Viscount Malign or Monsignore Saint-Paul at his elbow for a moment), he doesn't want to marry, begad ! Of course, as a Constitutional Sovereign, if he must, he must ; but why should he ?

Within a very short time, however, determined that the conflict of individual opinions shall no longer distract the State, the excellent Councillors have amongst themselves tossed up. That is to say, after an exhaustive ballot, just as if it related to no more sentimental a matter than the election of a Pope, they have selected their future Royal Princess, to the satisfaction of all—because to the satisfaction of none.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHOICE OF A ROYAL CONSORT.

WHEN this result is communicated to the Sovereign, it is received with his customary smile. A miniature portrait of the fortunate lady having been procured, he intimates his opinion to be that she is a devilish fine woman, and announces generally his devotion to devilish fine women. But he succeeds in persuading his High Officers of State to forbear the publication of their choice for the present, out of a feeling of delicacy, he says, for the illustrious lady.

Interpreting this reserve to indicate a sense of modesty, highly creditable to his Royal Highness, it is resolved that in the meantime measures shall be taken to ascertain privately the feelings of the illustrious lady herself. To the great joy of the statesmen, there is

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no exhibition on her part of any false delicacy whatever. She at once accepts the proposal unconditionally. She has been a long time in the market ; has been frequently disappointed ; and had indeed ceased to hope for anything better than some shabby coronet, if even that might not be soon beyond her reach. She is an extremely businesslike illustrious lady, and wastes no words about it. The only question she asks is—When ? The statesmen are delighted with her ; such a princess is all that is wanted to complete the felicity of the State.

But his Royal Highness is kept in the dark whilst this delicious negotiation is pending ; and thus he has a few days for reflection. If he only had the Viscount here, or Mon-signore ! But he has no one of the sort ; none but strangers are about him. He positively lies awake at night : even Burgundy—even brandy—will not give him sleep.

At last the announcement is conveyed to him that the illustrious lady accepts her fate. For a moment he is distraught, but only for a moment. He is a Constitutional Sovereign, and his course is clear. The responsibility is

not his, but the Ministry's. He had hoped for something else, but the great question is—How is the Government to be carried on? Obviously in this way amongst other details—that the Ministry shall be responsible.

Shall he dismiss the Ministry—call to his counsels by virtue of his royal prerogative a new Ministry—a sort of Titania Ministry, begad? He takes advice—upon a supposititious case—from the Law Officer of the Crown; the Law Officer advises him curtly that his royal prerogative does not in a practical sense extend so far as changing the Ministry, but only allows him to register a change effected by outside influences. 'Then what is the royal prerogative?' he asks innocently enough. 'May it please your Royal Highness, the royal prerogative is, in my opinion, the—the prerogative of the Crown.'

'Headed again, begad!' is his Royal Highness's private reflection; 'well, if I must, I must; the Ministry must take the responsibility. Titania is a sensible woman; she understands Constitutional Government; she shall have her position, begad! in some other way.'

So the intended matrimonial alliance of his Royal Highness is duly announced in the newspaper of his Capital. The world rejoices.

Congratulations pour in. All the High and Mighty Princes of the world express, upon an immeasurable amount of paper, their sense of his Royal Highness's happiness. Not one of them laughs in his sleeve ; such a thing was never heard of.

Amongst others, his Excellency the Viscount Malign felicitates his Royal Highness.

Count Oberon requests to be permitted the honour of felicitating him.

What is this ? In a charming note, full of friendly regard, Countess Titania felicitates him ! But somehow the charming note of the Countess Titania does not appear to exhibit the usual sprightliness of that lady's correspondence.

Fortunately his Royal Highness is not surrounded by his responsible Ministers when he receives, opens, reads the Countess's note. He is alone.

' Begad ! ' says his Royal Highness, turning pale.

There is a kernel in the heart, to speak so unscientifically, of every man, which, when it happens to be touched, proclaims, however tardy the answer, however feeble its tone, that the empire of human sympathy is universal and supreme. No matter how frivolous a man's life may be, how futile, how besotted, how frantic, how cruel, how God-forgotten, how Devil-ridden—But we are going a great deal too far, or at any rate too fast. This kind of language may create the impression that his Royal Highness is a very different person from what we are entitled to represent him to be. All who have had the honour of his acquaintance during his exile agree that he likes a good cigar and a good glass—or bottle for that matter—of Burgundy, with a variety of other gratifications of kindred character. Some are disposed to add—knowing less of the world than some others—that he is a fool. But no one says he is not a gentleman; and indeed the very reason why his rude and shrewd Republicans have recalled him to the throne of his ancestors is that both his faults and his folly are strictly those of a gentleman and not of a snob, whereas

there are faults and follies amongst themselves which seem to be otherwise. There is no reason in the world, therefore, why we should hesitate to acknowledge that the royal heart is vexed on account of the Countess Titania's letter of felicitation, and all the more because it does not exhibit the usual sprightliness of that lady's correspondence.

‘Begad!’ says his Royal Highness again, after half an hour's reflection, ‘I'll write to the Viscount.’

CHAPTER V.

A LETTER TO THE VISCOUNT.

‘MY DEAR VISCOUNT,’ he therefore proceeds to write,—‘I am much obliged to you for your kind congratulations. My Ministers, who have all the responsibility of this deuced affair, will send you their view of the matter in due course of time. But, to tell you the truth very privately and confidentially, I am the most miserable dog alive. Not only do I pass half my time in listening to debates in which I am not allowed to say a word, and the other half in signing papers that I am not allowed to read ; but I am not permitted to choose my own cigars because my responsible Home Minister has his views about tobacco, nor to select my own Burgundy because my responsible Foreign Minister has his policy with regard to differential duties. They cannot be responsible for

letting me lie in bed of a morning after a certain hour because of my physicians ; and they won't be responsible for my sitting up at night because of the bishop. I ask my responsible Law Adviser what are the royal prerogatives, and he says they are the prerogatives of the Crown. I had it on my tongue to ask what are the prerogatives of the Crown, but I knew he would answer that they are the royal prerogatives ; and if I had knocked him down there would have been a row. And now they take the responsibility of my marrying a woman I don't want. God forbid that I should say a word against the lady, who is no doubt a charming woman ; but I don't want her. I know I shall hate the very sight of her. Confound this Constitutional Government ! When you and I used to talk about it I had no idea it was going to turn out like this. But that is not the worst. You can guess, my dear Viscount, what has been the understanding between me and the Countess Titania when I give you the hint. I am of course quite aware that she is a sensible woman, as sensible as she is beautiful, and as much open to

reason with regard to Constitutional Government as to everything else. I hoped to be able to stave off this matrimonial business when I heard of it till I could see her, but these responsible gentlemen, by private negotiation, and before I ever heard a word, had settled everything with their princess, down to the very day of the wedding. They thought of my modesty, they said, confound them! And when it was their pleasure to communicate at last with me, the very next day it was positively proclaimed to the world in our *Gazette*! They could not be responsible for any further delay, was the answer I got. It really seems to me as if this kind of Constitutional Government were rather too constitutional by a good deal; but of course I cannot pretend to know, as my Ministers relieve me of all responsibility. But this is not all, my dear Viscount; in fact now I am coming to the worst. The Countess actually writes to congratulate me! and this I cannot say I understand. Of course she is an extremely sensible woman; and knows, like myself, how to make the best of a bad job; but I cannot say I understand this. I got her

letter this morning, and I write to you at once in spite of a deuced headache. My dear Viscount, pray tell me the truth. I am so sick of all this Constitutional Government that if the Countess says the word I will stand upon my honour, even if I throw up the whole thing and let the State go to the devil. Of course if I give the thing up the other lady will be off, but not otherwise, I fear. Or I could tell her that it is a mistake; but then there would be a row; and after all the Ministers would only find somebody else. They say the Prince can do no wrong; and they seem determined he shall not have a chance. The only thing I can think of is to be taken devilish ill, and so to postpone the marriage till I can see the Countess and you. Pray advise me; but for the sake of pity don't let any one see this letter, and don't breathe a word about what I have told you, or the Ministers will do I don't know what. Remember me to all old friends, and say I am ashappyas a cock sparrow, but sometimes wish I could be with them again; and believe me,

‘My dear Viscount Malign,

‘Your most abjectly miserable friend.

‘P.S. I cannot say that I quite understand what all this responsibility means. Can you tell me?’

‘P.P.S. I can understand that a reigning Sovereign can do no wrong, but I don’t see the merit of it if they won’t allow him to do anything at all.’

CHAPTER VI.

SHE CANNOT THROW IT OFF.

PRETTY Titania has tried hard to throw it off. She is quite aware that she is a woman of the world, but she cannot throw it off. She has kept it to herself, but she cannot throw it off. She has travelled, flirted, drunk dirty water, laughed, dined, danced, possibly gambled; but she cannot throw it off. She has gone to mass, confessed, said prayers innumerable, and tried her beautiful best to listen to homilies and sermons; but she cannot throw it off. She has given alms to the poor, visited the sick, made garments for the heathen, and kissed a whole army of babies; but she cannot throw it off.

It is not the thought of being jilted by the Prince that she cannot throw off.

She has read novels, written poetry, per-

formed a whole library of excellent music ; but she cannot throw it off. She has shut herself up, wandered in wildernesses, climbed mountains, descended into mines, and gone to sea in a yacht ; but she cannot throw it off. She has fretted, fumed, scolded, wept, screamed when by herself, stamped her foot, and cast things out of window ; but she cannot throw it off. She has had new dresses made, new bonnets, new boots ; but cannot throw it off. She has changed her horses, her lapdog, her servants every one ; but cannot throw it off. She has been to doctors, to dentists, to photographers, to painters ; but she cannot throw it off. She has been ashamed to go to Viscount Malign, but she has gone to Monsignore Saint-Paul at last, and made a clean breast of it ; and yet she cannot throw it off.

The doctors say her health is perfect ; the dentists cannot discover a speck on her teeth ; Monsignore Saint-Paul, her kind confessor, has absolved her, consoled her, and advised her to throw it off ; and yet she cannot throw it off. Monsignore has gone so far as to remonstrate with her, rebuke her, reproach

her ; but she cannot throw it off. Autumn has become winter, and winter spring ; but she cannot throw it off. His Royal Highness has been recalled to the throne of his ancestors ; but she cannot throw it off. She has not by any means forgotten her betrothal to Royalty ; but she cannot throw it off. She is as covetous of admiration, ascendancy, and honour, as any woman ought to be ; but she cannot throw it off. The dust that stuffed her doll in earlier days is found to have *not* been all let out ; she cannot throw it off.

When the announcement of the approaching marriage of his Royal Highness, published in the local *Gazette*, comes to be copied into all the newspapers of the world, her brother tries his best to keep the news out of her sight ; and as she, like many another charming woman, is not a great reader of newspapers, he succeeds for a few days. It is at a fashionable reception, therefore, that she happens to hear of it. It is an elderly maiden lady who happens to tell her. The elderly maiden lady is astonished to find that she has not heard of it. The elderly maiden lady remembers something all of a sudden,

and watches her countenance closely whilst enlarging upon the details of the news. The selected princess is forty-one by the *Almanach*. She has been disappointed a good many times. Her charms are understood to be decidedly stale—‘as stale as mine, my dear,’ says the elderly maiden lady frankly, having herself thrown up the game for ever about the time when the selected princess left off pinafores.

The Countess Titania, casting a single momentary glance like silent lightning at the malicious informant, and turning for one moment pale as woman’s heart flutters in spite of itself, is able to check a sigh, and able, with the help of her fan, to smile in her own delightful way. That the smile is slightly artificial is only part of that delightful way.

‘I am very glad to hear it,’ says the Countess.

‘I think,’ rejoins the elderly maiden lady, ‘I do think he might have married a younger person.’

‘Do you really?’ says the Countess. ‘I confess I think the match a very suitable one.’

‘Do you know him?’

‘A little.’

‘Ah! I know him a little also; I suppose we stand in the same position, my dear.’

‘Very much the same.’

‘Have you seen him lately?’

‘Not for a long time.’

‘Neither have I; we’re still in the same position.’

‘Yes, quite so, are we not?’

‘I remember, I *once* had a letter from him.’

‘Really?’

‘A very nice letter, I remember; quite a love-letter, my dear, I remember. Did you ever have a letter from him?’

‘Oh yes.’

‘Again in the same position. How odd! Now I’m curious to know what your letter was about.’

‘Ah! that would be tellings, as we used to say at school. But what was yours about?’

‘Well, dear, we will exchange confidences, as there is no one listening.’

‘I shall be sure to tell,’ says Titania.

‘Well, dear, you may. You must know that the creature was—I don’t like to say

very tipsy, dear, to one of his friends—but it was at the opera.'

'How shocking!'

'Wasn't it? Well, I dropped my glove.'

'For shame!' Titania says, flirting her fan.

'It was in the crush-room, dear, and indeed I couldn't help it.'

'I suppose not. How do you do, dear Lady Dragonet?'

'Ah! how do you do, dear? And so the Prince——'

'Yes, isn't it pretty?' says the Countess Titania.

'We used to think, my dear Titania——'

'Dear me, how cold I feel!' says the elderly maiden lady; 'surely that is Viscount Malign.'

'So it is. Ah, Viscount!'

The Viscount makes his bow to the ladies in turn.

'And so your friend the Prince——' says Lady Dragonet.

'Yes, oh yes,' replies the Viscount; 'I learn his Royal Highness is exceedingly popular.'

‘So I believe,’ says Lady Dragonet.

‘Quite a model constitutional Sovereign.’

‘Really, how interesting!’

‘Yes; quite in the hands of his Ministers. They choose his cigars, and taste his wine.’

‘Now, you naughty Viscount, you’re joking.’

‘Not at all; the Court physician decides when he shall awake in the morning, the bishop when he shall go to sleep at night.’

‘Ha—ha—ha! poor man!’

‘Yes indeed; some one takes the responsibility of everything, and he is perfectly free from care.’

‘And how does he like it?’

‘Immensely; he is as happy, he says, as a cock sparrow, and wishes to be remembered to all his friends.’

‘Dear man! And, amongst other things, I see——’

‘Oh yes; how do you do, Mr. Charity? I have not seen you for an age.’

CHAPTER VII.

MR. CHARITY.

MR. CHARITY is a gentleman of very lofty character ; and of deportment to correspond. He pays tithe of mint, anise, and cummin ; does *not* neglect the weightier matters of the law—certainly not; brews a favourite ‘ Entire,’ sold retail by his retainers, slightly sophisticated, at ‘3d. per Quart in Your Own Jugs;’ and subscribes liberally to every philanthropic institution and every benevolent fund. Mr. Charity is a gentleman of the old school, too ; affects a high neckcloth, even at fashionable receptions, and coat-tails cut to a peculiar pattern ; wears out of doors a broad-brimmed hat and white spatterdashes ; has his seat in the House on the second bench below the gangway ; and goes to the brewery in state every second morning, in a yellow chariot

drawn by a pair of fat horses at four miles an hour, driven by a fat coachman in a powdered wig sunk in the midst of a crimson hammercloth, and attended by a tall footman, also in powdered wig, standing on the foot-board behind with false calves and black silk stockings. It is expected that Mr. Charity will be a baronet before the session is out, and a peer before he dies.

‘How do you do, Mr. Charity?’ says his Excellency the Viscount Malign; ‘I have not seen you for an age.’

‘I hope I see you well, Viscount Malign,’ is the ponderous answer of Mr. Charity, sinking his chin a little more in his high neckcloth; ‘I hope I see you well.’

Mr. Charity takes very good care, however, not to look too closely at the Ambassador Extraordinary; he looks over his shoulder, indeed, an unusually long way; he makes off from him, if so unrefined a phrase may be used, as quickly as he can.

The ladies do not happen to be personally acquainted with Mr. Charity.

‘I always think him such a delightful man,’ says the elderly maiden lady.

‘Do you think so?’ says the Lady Dragonet.

‘Such a noble countenance!’

‘Do you think so?’

‘So rich, dear Lady Dragonet!’

‘I suppose he is.’

‘So philanthropical; so bountiful!’

‘And his name looks so well in large gold letters against the sky!’ says the Lady Dragonet.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE REVELATION.

‘I AM glad to see you looking so well,’ says his Excellency to the Countess Titania presently, when out of hearing; ‘what can this be about the Prince?’

She cannot throw it off! She looks frankly into those glowing eyes that see into her soul, but she cannot throw it off. He whom alone she fears will be angry; but she cannot throw it off. She dare not avow it. The trial of this moment is terrible. But for the presence of all this gay company, she could not possibly maintain, as she so desperately does, this artificial smile of composure. But for this desperate effort, she would burst into tears. No, she cannot throw it off!

His Excellency is not to be deceived. Even when she says so prettily: ‘Indeed I

do not know, I have not heard of it till now,' looking honestly into that inflexible face, he is not to be deceived.

They seat themselves apart on a couch; for it is a small and select party and the rooms are free from crowding, and this is an anteroom.

'The Prince has written me,' says his Excellency; 'he says this marriage is contrary to his inclination.'

'I am afraid he must expect that; but I hope she will make him happy.'

'Do you?'

'I do, sincerely.'

'But he tells me of—of his prior attachment.'

'We must both forget it.'

'I admire your heroism. But the Prince says plainly that he is willing to return to private life rather than sacrifice his honour.'

'It is very heroic of him, but surely that would be a pity.' No, she cannot throw it off.

'I am fain to hope something might be done without so extreme a measure as that. Even for your sake—'

‘Not for my sake, Viscount.’ No, even tempted thus, she cannot!

It must be owned that the Ambassador Extraordinary is not inconsiderably non-plussed. It is with some difficulty that he has brought himself to recognise heroism in his Royal Highness; but he remembers that, with all his faults, the Prince is a gentleman. It is with much more difficulty that he begins to imagine in the Countess Titania a corresponding magnanimity; for she is only a woman, and has been taken to be very much of a frivolous woman. It is true the one would sacrifice what he possesses in reality, while the other is surrendering only what is to her an expectancy; but even still the surrender is more surprising than the sacrifice; and the Viscount Malign, seldom astonished, is certainly astonished now.

‘I cannot understand you,’ he says; ‘do you mean what you say? What answer shall I give to the Prince?’

‘Tell him that I am proud of his affection—honestly proud of it; tell him that I am not base enough to pretend—Viscount, I shall faint!—let me come to you to-morrow.’

‘I will come to you—at noon. Good-night. Shall I leave you here?’

‘Pray do ; I shall recover soon. Good-night.’

The Ambassador is certainly for once nonplussed a little.

‘What,’ thinks his Excellency as he goes homeward, ‘what can this be? A feeble Sybarite—a debauchee—so seriously regarding a mere frivolous butterfly, that he is prepared to sacrifice the very ambition of his life, attained so unexpectedly, after years upon years of tedious exile and painful humiliation—prepared indeed to cast off what people call a crown when only newly won—for the sake of—whether it be his honour or his love I care not! A man who knows women—all at their worst and never at their best! And a simpering girl, with a pretty face and a bewitching tongue; in the market without a mother; having found a purchaser for her charms wearing this thing called a crown—the badge to such natures as hers of ineffable felicity; and having, as I doubt not now, and as I have failed to see till now, rejected her full share of suitors for his sake;

this mere saleable toy I find ready in her turn to yield up her contract at the moment of fruition because of—Because of *what*?—There is no vulgar quarrel between this experienced pair : they would not quarrel yet in any case. She has not taken umbrage ; if she had, she would wait, not break. She is not afraid ; such women are never afraid. There is but one explanation of all this—she has another lover !—She is wise enough, perhaps, to prefer a little more virtue with a little less—or a good deal less—distinction. Or she is shrewd enough to be content with the substantial dignity of some average of nobility, as contrasted with the somewhat shadowy royalty now within her grasp. She has found, it may be, an admirer with only a more enjoyable countenance—which women think so much of—with eyes and lips and whiskers which in their sweet imagination are such invaluable possessions. Or—can Titania have taken a fancy to the beauty of goodness—to some young clergyman? Stop!—what if it were our young physician?’ He says no more.

‘Lais,’ exclaims the Viscount Malgin in his Sanctuary, ‘fair Lais, type of woman-

hood, listen to the news. Our sweet Titania has fallen in love with the young physician ! Listen, ye men of might and mark and metal ! ye did your best, ye did your worst, to crush many things ; but ye never could crush Love ! Listen, O shadowy crowds of human good and human ill, marching from mystery of birth to mystery of death ! your story may some time be told, in Earth or Heaven or Hell, but it is no story without Love ! Listen, fair ladies, and for once blush not ! for the wildest and the wantonest must worship Love ! Listen, ye high-priests of the offerings of blood ! ye snakes that make it venom ! the fragrance of it all is but the breath of Love ! Listen, O withered flowers ! that which is dead is Love ! Listen, O shadows of the outer chamber !—O shadows of the depth ! all is shadow but Love ! Listen, thou blue vault bright with stars ! all light is love !

‘Why should not my poor Titania fall in love ?’

‘But what of the physician ?’—

‘What of the sweet young maiden, Lais ? what of the tender sorrowing woman-child ?’

‘We had not thought of this, Lais, the priest and I ; we had not dreamt of this.’

‘And he is relenting towards the youth, I now remember ; this also we had not thought of.’

The Ambassador is no doubt a good deal at a loss.

Next day at noon the Countess Titania is paler than usual, and she trembles a little—trembles a good deal—when the Viscount Malign arrives ; trembles still while he tells her of the morning’s gossip of the town.

‘Now, my poor Titania,’ he says at length, ‘I know your secret ; confide in me.’

‘Then I have less shame, Viscount, to confess ; for I cannot deceive you if I would, and I would not if I could. *I cannot throw it off !*’

‘Try to disguise it, then ; is it not hopeless ?’

‘Hopeless it may be, Viscount ; but I cannot—I cannot !’

‘Many a woman, Titania——’

‘Many a woman ! Oh yes, no doubt, many a woman. And many a man, Viscount, many a man !’

‘ He is majestic, poor Titania, and you are lovely ; if this world could be made to go well, this would be enough.’

‘ He is all, Viscount ; I am nothing ! Give him to me, in rags, penniless, starving, degraded—*dead*, Viscount Malign ! and let me but be his slave !’

CHAPTER IX.

MONSIGNORE IS NETTLED.

MONSIGNORE SAINT-PAUL is nettled, very considerably nettled. The Viscount Malign has been with him, and has told him some news. He has not exhibited serious discomposure while the Viscount Malign was present, but no sooner is the Viscount gone than his manner changes.

‘What ! are my schemes to be overturned because of a love-sick girl ? Have I intrigued all these years only to see the cup of fruition dashed from my lips by the refusal of a frivolous pretty woman to accept the promised dignity for which a thousand pretty women, not frivolous, would sell themselves body and soul to-morrow, all eager for the preference ? I thought this fancy of hers to be no better than a passing whim, or more

likely a grotesque affectation. The Viscount—and no one knows better—tells me it is a serious and irreclaimable infatuation. For what have I placed the Prince where he is, if he is to be subjected now to the influence of a stranger? For what have I trained our fair Countess all this time so anxiously, and watched over her so assiduously, if she is to fail me at the moment of success? This must not be. It is *my* prince and *my* princess who must reign there, and for *my* purposes. The besotted burghers and their dowdy wives desire to have a sovereign lady with their new sovereign lord. Had I not provided for that? Until the woman is there as well as the man, what can I do? I give them their fair lady and I am supreme. When they open the door to the woman, they admit the priest. I cannot have a stranger. My pretty Countess must be coerced—no, coaxed a little.'

CHAPTER X.

CONFESSION.

‘AND what is this that lies so heavy on your mind, dear Countess Titania? Why not have come to me long ago if in distress?’

‘I came to you, good Father; and you gave me your counsel with your blessing, as you always do.’

‘Explain yourself, I do not remember.’

‘My heart is broken with a load of love, Father. You told me to throw it off. How can I throw it off?’

‘Love? That is a school-girl’s word.’

‘Then am I a school-girl yet, and will always be a school-girl now.’

‘Tell me how it has happened; tell me how the devil has taken hold of you, my daughter, and I will see that he is driven

away. Tell me how he torments you, and you shall be defended.'

'Alas! it is no influence of devils, Father; but that of the angels; and of the blessed saints—who have themselves once loved, I know, each one of them. And it is no torment that I suffer, but a sweet ecstasy—call it a sweet agony if you must.'

'Tell me, then.'

'I have so far told you before, good Father; you know my secret. Months ago I told you; I have no more to tell. Not a night but he is in all my dreams. Not a day but, if I close my eyes, he is seated by my side. His voice is for ever in my ears, like a delicious song; my hand is for ever in his grasp.'

'It is a malady, my child; in such excess it is a curse and not a blessing; resist it and it will leave you; call up your energies and you will overcome it. Go into the world—seek change of scene.'

'The world, Father—and I am still so young!—is exhausted, but for him; change of scene I have sought, but the one grand figure is everywhere I go. The world—he is my

world ; the scene—all scenery is but a background to his portrait.’

‘Titania, this is infatuation ; you will go mad.’

‘If this be madness, kind Father, let me be always so.’

‘But what of the Prince ?’

‘I cannot help it. Let him forget me. He never *loved* me—no ! he can find another.’

‘Nay ; I can assure you he has loved you sincerely. He is distressed beyond measure.’

‘It was not *love*, Father ; there was no *love*—such as *this* ! If he is inconvenienced, I am most sorry.’

‘But why should he be inconvenienced ? Why should you ? Marry him ; do as so many others have done—as so many others yet must do—make a sacrifice !’

‘I do not profess to be entitled, dear Monsignore Saint-Paul, to claim the privilege of exalted character. Believe me, I am not inclined to allow myself the luxury of affectation, or prudery, or even virtue such as virtue of the higher order is. For all that I

deserve, I would marry the Prince, were he far less of a prince than he is. It has been understood between us, and I am much honoured by his remembrance of it. But I release him. He is very, very kind, but I release him.' (The Countess is looking at the matter more rationally now.)

'Release him! but why should he release you?'

'I will ask him; and he will do it for my sake, I know. Besides, dear Monsignore, is he not much more advantageously betrothed elsewhere?' (The Countess is becoming still more rational.)

'Without his concurrence, dear Countess.'

'Fie, dear Monsignore, consider! Think of the scandal you suggest. Pray think, not of me, but of others.'

Monsignore is thus reminded that he is after all speaking to a woman of the world. 'It is not, I acknowledge,' he says, 'only for yourself that I am solicitous. I am no less anxious for the Prince; he needs a judicious partner in life.'

'Then I fear I should be much at fault.'

'I cannot explain all. Let me say that

arrangements have been made upon the faith of this marriage.'

'If my withdrawal from a contract which I never understood to have any value except to myself should incommode *you*, dear Monsignore Saint-Paul, believe me I am grieved indeed.'

'I have not spoken of being incommoded, dear Countess ; but I may tell you that the position which the Prince now so happily occupies has been attained by means of—consideration for—for yourself in a great measure.'

'I understand you, Monsignore. I am highly honoured. I am not entitled to pretend that I would have done otherwise than obey to the letter whatever commands I might receive.' (Her spirit is rising.) 'I was fit for nothing else ; I profess no more.'

'Do not be angry, dear Countess.'

'Indeed I am not angry ; forgive me if I seem to be so. I owe you too much.'

'Then let me speak to you as I have been accustomed to do. Let me hope that further consideration may lead you to remember that this enthusiasm cannot possibly last. Think

of your education and habits. How can you be permanently happy except in the sphere of life you belong to? You cannot hope even to marry this youth.'

'Love never ceases to hope; I will wait.'

'He is already betrothed.'

'Love never ceases to hope; I cannot help it.'

'Is this not wicked, Titania?'

'I know it is.'

'Then cast away all such thoughts.'

'It is impossible.'

'Will you ask me for counsel?'

The Countess Titania, pale, but as charming as ever, kneels by Monsignore's chair.

'I will not ask you for counsel, dear Father, for this bad reason—that I should not follow it. But I will humble myself still more; and if you say it is more wickedly, let it be more wickedly; I pray to you thus. Help me! He is your relative. I am told that you loved him when he was a boy——'

'*What?*'

'It was Viscount Malign that told me.'

'And did Viscount Malign tell you to ask me this?'

‘No; he pities *her*. Alas! I do not; alas, alas!’

‘And you would ask me to—to supplant her?’

‘I would; it is the sacred truth, I would; God forgive me, I must!’

‘And what is to become of her?’

‘I care not what; I have no pity.’

‘And what of yourself?’

‘I care not what! I have ceased to think of that.’

‘This is unworthy of you, Titania.’

‘Not unworthy of *me*.’

‘Then be more worthy; be worthy of your womanhood; shake off this temptation; I must rebuke you.’

‘Dear Monsignore Saint-Paul, as I kneel before you, tell me this—if you can. How was it that I came to be introduced to him? Do you know?’

‘You met him at dinner, did you not?’

‘Was it by accident?’

‘By invitation, I presume.’

‘By the accident of invitation?’

‘So I would presume; I was not there.’

‘I thought you might know ; that was all. Forgive me.’

‘May I hope, then, dear Countess, that after this conversation you will make another effort to recover yourself?’

‘Father, you have never loved. Heaven exempts its priesthood from the danger.’

‘Not always. And you must remember that I was not always what I am.’

‘True ; but I dare not ask you.’

‘You may.’

‘Have you ever, then?’

‘In my young days, young lady—But I will say no more.’

‘And you took fatherly advice?’

‘I will say no more.’

‘And you—you threw it off?’

‘Look at me now.’

The agitated woman looks into his face—a calm face without a wrinkle. ‘No,’ she exclaims, ‘you have never loved a woman! But if you had, you know not what it is when a woman loves a man.’

‘I think, Titania,’ says the priest, without a smile, ‘I think I do.’

‘You would never ask me then—to throw it off!’

‘So many have succeeded.’

‘I will try to do this, Father—I will try to act not unworthily of my love. I will try to regard it as a holy thing, and worship it with a great fear. It shall be my god!’

CHAPTER XI.

GHOSTLY ADVICE.

MONSIGNORE SAINT-PAUL has met his nephew several times in Sweetbriar Gardens, when on his visits of inspection to the Abbey of All Saints and Angels, gradually rising into note. The war between Parson John Jacob and the high-nosed Earl has so fully occupied the attention of all at Ditchwater, that the worthy rector has been enabled faithfully to fulfil his treaty of peace with his nephew; and under such favourable conditions the intercourse between the nephew and the son has afforded to each a fair opportunity of acquiring respect for the other. To Julian the solid promptitude of thought and commanding character of his cousin appear especially admirable qualities, when contrasted with so much incertitude and feebleness in

the world around ; while to Monsignore the earnestness, uprightness, and magnanimous self-denial of the young physician seem to call up recollections of great, good, humble men of other days, the accepted patterns of human generosity, endurance, and faith.

The wholesome feeling of self-reproach that had of late acquired a place in Monsignore's mind with reference to his thoughtless adoption of the desire to avenge himself upon the irritable and indomitable father by assailing the harmless and virtuous son, has ripened into a desire to make amends. The cordial compliment to himself, also, which was so clearly exhibited in the transfer of Marrabone's trust, could not but make a favourable impression of its own upon his heart. But to these considerations there has now to be added another. If the Countess Titania is to be won over from her fascination, and, as is not yet by any means impossible, forced, however reluctantly, upon the seat of influence which she has been destined for years to occupy in other interest than her own, it is plain that this can only be accomplished by an entire reversal of the cruel

policy which has been pursued towards Julian and Madonna. The bonds of virtuous affection in which these innocent spirits had been by nature bound, must be no longer weakened by art. The spurious attachment which had been brought about, to so large an extent unexpectedly, between Julian and Countess Titania, it must now be the object of art to sever.

Monsignore's cob, therefore, is being led up and down the street before the modest lodging of Julian Saint-Paul. Monsignore is making a visit to the lodger.

Julian has been indisposed, as he now too often is, for a few days, and Monsignore has called to ask his opinion upon some point connected with the work of the Abbey. He must really persist, Monsignore says, in taking the liberty of asking his dear cousin's opinion upon a variety of questions, as they come up, which turn so much upon the peculiar wants of the locality, and so little upon the dogmas of theology, that he himself is quite unequal to deal with them, all the while that he is extremely unwilling to allow them to be overlooked.

‘I fear I am exceedingly stupid to-day,’ says Julian, ‘and of less than little use to you.’

‘Permit me to ask, my dear Julian, whether there is any reason why a friend and relative may not inquire the cause of your so frequent indisposition?’

‘It is difficult to explain; and, to one in your sacred office, still more difficult. I am haunted by two spirits. They have haunted me long—always together! For a time one was the spirit of good, the other of evil. Now they are both of good—always together! While evil possessed the one, I could turn towards the other. Even when I failed to escape from the influence of fear, I could at least behold afar off the influence of hope. Now I would escape from neither, and yet they are not one. Are there two Gods in Heaven, both equally divine—two Virtues, equal and yet opposed?’

‘There are not, my dear Julian, there are not. There is but one God and one Virtue, any other must be a counterfeit.’

‘So I had thought. But how may a suffering mortal, with his purblind eyes, discern the true from the false?’

‘Let me offer an illustration, dear Julian. In the world, as Nature has made it, let us suppose there are two women. Let us suppose that I—for I am a man, and of like passions with other men—worship these two women. Suppose that I am so enamoured—for I am but a man—as to say, “These constitute my god! their beauty is my Virtue! I seek nothing else! I worship them! to me these are the Divine!” Most men do this with one, some with many. We take, in my instance, two. But it is an axiom of thought that I—unless I be a foolish example, and then it would be vain to pursue the inquiry—that I cannot have two Divines, nor two Virtues. One, therefore, must be spurious. However like the Divine, it is the Not-divine; however like the Virtuous, it is the Not-virtuous. When I am told this, I weep. I cry, “Which, which? Both,” I say, “are so lovely!”’

‘And what does wisdom answer?’

‘The wisdom of the fool says, “Why not both?” The wisdom of the sage says, “Why either?” The Divine is not conflict, but peace. Virtue is not contention, but repose.’

‘I fear it is beyond the reach of logic, dear Cousin Paul.’

‘But suppose it is woman thus enamoured. For her, in like manner, there shall be two claimants. One shall be a betrothed, the other—the object of a passing fascination. For the one she has waited, refused, manœuvred if you will call it so. They are a pair, well-matched as the world goes, not for the supernatural bliss of angels, but for the more modest welfare of very worldly persons. For the other she has conceived a passion. He is suddenly all, and all else nothing. For him she will sacrifice the hopes of anxious friends, betrothed affection, appropriate position, usefulness in her native sphere, peace of mind, almost the sympathies of womanhood. What if I were to say to her, “Take one of these, and you may have both; take the other, and you can have neither; take one as husband, and you retain the other as friend; seek the other, and you lose both friend and husband?” Yet such is the case. Tell me what your counsel would be.’

‘What would be yours?’

‘The wisdom of the fool would say,
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“Hazard all for the passion ; the more sudden, the more divine.” The wisdom of the sage would say, “Hazard nothing ; betrothal is sacred ; passion, like heated water, will pass off in vapour, and be forgotten.”’

‘Betrothal is sacred,’ murmurs Julian.

‘So sacred that passion is a daily sacrifice upon its altar.’

‘What shall be his punishment who is false to his faith while worshipping the divinity none the less ?’

‘His heart shall be cleft in twain, Julian ; and half a heart is——’

‘Nothing—but dead flesh.’

CHAPTER XII.

THE CROWN DEFEATS THE MINISTRY.

MONSIGNORE has reported to the Ambassador Extraordinary. The young man, he says, has been put on his guard ; a little time may restore to him his old peace ; the phantasm of passion may probably fade, while the image of faith shall retain its form ; this may suffice to effect their object. The lady is more difficult to deal with. Her logic is woman's logic ; she cannot do but what she will. But if reason cools one side of the wall, passion must be cooled on the other.

The Viscount Malign suggests that if passion continues to warm one side of the wall, reason may perhaps cool the other to less advantage than could be desired.

His Royal Highness is encouraged to be indisposed ; the day for his marriage is not

fixed. The Court physicians prescribe for one symptom after another ; but very much in vain. To their demand that the Prince shall discontinue the use of his Burgundy, the whole of the Ministry reply that the consequences of such an example upon the revenue they could not be responsible for. A recommendation to surrender his cigars causes a division in the cabinet, which has to be settled by the casting vote ; when his Royal Highness, voting on principle for the retention of the *status quo*, is thus enabled to afford to his delighted subjects one more instance of his instinctive appreciation of constitutional maxims. Nor does the affair stop here. Taking heart of grace, his Royal Highness, being permitted by his physicians to rise late, determines, in defiance of the bishop, no longer to retire early. His excesses extend well into the night. The people discover that for a constitutional sovereign to be too straitlaced is a radical error ; and his license is approved. The affianced princess hears of all this. A former lover, hitherto only over-tardy, has meanwhile come to the scratch. He is accepted. The Prince is

once more free. Discouraged by such a scandalous miscarriage of their well-laid schemes, the Ministry decline to take any further responsibility in the article of match-making. The Prince recovers his health. The people rejoice. Emboldened by popularity, his Royal Highness becomes more of himself—jollier, that is to say, and jollier every day. Constitutional government passes into another phase—the anxiety of Responsible Ministers to keep their places. Royalty can now do pretty much as it pleases; and such a person as the Viscount Malign receives private intelligence that another year may see it proclaimed from the throats of several pieces of artillery to have passed into the gorgeous perfection of Empire.

CHAPTER XIII.

TITANIA AT THE GARDENS.

THE Countess Titania has become a frequent visitor to Sweetbriar Gardens. Her fashionable life is now but one half of her existence; the other half is that of the beautiful patroness of the squalid poor.

Let it not be imagined that the pretty patrician has ceased to be a shrewd and sensible woman. The great world sees her very much the same as ever. That which she could not throw off, and cannot still, is not visible there. During the fashionable hours of the day, and the night, she is to be seen wherever other fashionable ladies are to be seen. It is during the unfashionable hours of the earlier morning that she now and then makes an expedition to the field of her beneficence. Moreover she takes sufficient care to

avoid remark. When she happens to encounter Sergeant Jollybuff, or the doctor, it seems to be the most natural of incidents that she should be there. She is much beloved by the poor. She is more accustomed to the place now. She does not bestow fur cloaks and full purses. But she is unquestionably kind and good.

Let it not be imagined either that the object with which the Countess Titania visits the Gardens is to haunt the footsteps of the young physician. Frivolous as she may be, and possibly designing, both by nature and habit, and blinded as she may be to some of the customary considerations of womanly pride by the sweet passion that has conquered her, she is not a mere self-seeker, even in that game in which, as in war, all play is said to be fair. Doubtless there might be but little wooing wanted if Julian would woo. But that she should take the task upon herself is far from her mind. Not even to obtrude her presence upon him would she consent. Not even would she desire it. To have the delight of witnessing his sacred work, to enjoy the contemplation

of his character, to hear his praises, to join in prayers for him, to adore him as if in his own temple, these are her delights. And, dear to her sight as is his face, she meets him, when chance so falls out, honestly without purpose; and, sweet as his voice is in her ear, she is almost afraid to listen lest she should delay his work. The Countess Titania is no feather-headed love-sick girl, but a devotee; no passion-tempted infatuate, but a worshipper knowing what she worships.

It is in comparative unconsciousness of all this devotedness that the young physician follows his task of daily beneficence. That he is entirely unaffected by the consciousness that his labours are in a manner shared by this graceful auxiliary, cannot be said; or that he is otherwise than profoundly impressed by a sense of her presence; but if he were to feel that he was being pursued, this of itself would be enough to awaken his alarm; and if he even knew no more than that he was being regarded with a woman's admiration, such is the sensitiveness of his spirit that this alone would provoke disfavour and distress.

Upon Sergeant Jollybuff the effect of the

fine lady's occasional presence is extremely exhilarating, and it is a new delight to him to attend her to the various holes and corners of the Gardens for the exhibition of his favourite clients. The good man has so far subjected her to discipline that she administers pecuniary aid in regulated doses of small amount, while her benefactions in kind take the form of correspondingly reasonable gifts under his strict control. But the grace of her presence, the womanly tenderness of her words, and even her tears of sympathy, he permits her to dispense without stint: and many a sorrowing mother, penitent daughter, forlorn wife, sick child, and even repentant ruffian, tells the Sergeant that the eyes of the beautiful lady shine upon them like the stars of blessed heaven in the dark night, and that her sweet smile is as the smile of the very daughters of God!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SADNESS OF LOVE.

MADONNA GAY is sad indeed. Her lover is no longer seen at the house of the kindly Emeritus Professor. Nor is he indeed seen elsewhere. He is an invalid.

He performs his work at Sweetbriar Gardens as he may, but otherwise never leaves his rooms; shuts himself up with melancholy—call it Mania; entreats his friends to bear with him and leave him undisturbed, and he will be better soon. Even Sir Constantine, firmest of friends invited to take part in a lengthened yachting expedition, he has persuaded to make the engagement, glad even to dispense with his brotherly attendance for a time; he is thus more than ever alone.

But Madonna has not failed to hear, as women hear of such things, of the novel visitor at Sweetbriar Gardens. Mariana has in fact been made a confidante, and has brought her full particulars.

Feminine impulsiveness must be her excuse, and may perhaps fairly be so, but Mariana's account of the matter is perfectly clear, and alas ! perfectly intelligible. Julian, she reports, is infatuated; the Countess haunts him like an angel of darkness ; her audacity recognises no bounds.

'I cannot believe it, dear Mariana,' says Madonna ; 'he is too noble to be so deluded ; of too exalted a nature to be so pitifully enthralled ; he is not the vulgar creature you suppose, to be bewitched by a wanton ; I cannot believe it.'

'Well, dear,' answers her friend, 'you know him best, and I should be sorry indeed to disturb your confidence in him ; and I hope he may think better of it and come round to reason again ; but I should be deceiving you, dear, if I were to let you think that I have any confidence in any man alive ! Mr. Trigonometer himself——'

‘We won’t be personal, dear Mariana; but I shall never cease to believe in Julian. He is bewitched, as many a good and noble man has been before him. Whether Heaven will rescue him I cannot tell; he is in God’s hands; but I fear it is more than I can bear, Mariana, more than I can bear.’

Mariana, however, being a practical woman, desires to regard the matter in a practical light. Why not let some one make a personal appeal to Julian? Our Georgius might be asked to do so.

But Madonna cannot entertain the idea. No, Julian is not a man to be remonstrated with. Even infatuated as is supposed, he would listen to no rebuke when his own heart does not rebuke him.

‘Why not, then, appeal to the woman?’ says Mariana in her decisive way.

‘This,’ replies Madonna, ‘would surely be only worse. If guilty, she would simply deny it; and if innocent——’

‘Innocent, dear Madonna!’ interposes her friend. ‘In our Georgius’s style of language, I’m afraid it’s you that are innocent.’

‘I can believe her innocent,’ says Madonna;

‘I can suppose that her admiration is as honest as my own.’

‘Don’t be silly, dear. You think all the world ought to run after your lover, of course. I am not so absurd in my own case, because I know there are very few who could be expected to appreciate Mr. Trigonometer.’

‘But there are many, dear Mariana, you must acknowledge, who could not be blamed for liking Julian.’

‘Oh yes, he’s a commoner person no doubt ; but surely to goodness, Madonna Gay, you don’t mean to encourage all the world to run after your beau !’

‘I have that confidence in the good faith, Mariana——’

‘In the good faith of your sex, dear ; that is what you mean ? You have such confidence, you silly darling, in the good faith of women in general that you are quite prepared to see a score of them making love to your lover ! Is that what you mean, dear ? Then I say it’s ridiculous. If any other girl were to make up to Mr. Trigonometer, I would simply tear her eyes out !’

‘Not if he disregarded her ?’

‘Wouldn’t I? But do you mean to say you’re insane enough to think Julian disregards the Countess?’

‘I am afraid I cannot say so much; but——’

‘But nonsense, dear; do be a rational girl, and not a baby. I mean to write a letter to the woman. I’ll ask Georgius what he thinks. I won’t let him write, because she would never be able to read his handwriting, or to understand his spelling; but he will tell me what he thinks I ought to say.’

‘Please don’t,’ says Madonna; ‘let us wait; it may be better than you think.’

‘You dear creature! I can’t help loving you; but you are very silly, Madonna Gay, very silly indeed.’

‘My heart is broken, Mariana.’

‘Oh no, dear, it isn’t; I don’t see much to fret about. For my own part I don’t expect to be married to Mr. Trigonometer for years. I think early marriages are injudicious.’

‘It is not, dear Mariana, that I want to marry early.’

‘You get a whole horde of squalling things

about you before you know what to do with them.'

'Dearest Mariana, I was not thinking of anything of the kind.'

'I dare say not, dear; that's what I say. You don't think at all, you only fidget.'

'Well, dear, I'll try to wait.'

'Of course you will; you're young yet, very young, and matters will come all right in time—they always do.'

'Well, there's no harm in wishing that the Countess Titania would——'

'Would take up with somebody else's lover; I know that's what you mean. If she tries to take up with mine—I give you fair warning——!'

'At anyrate, dear,' says Madonna, 'I always feel better when I have a talk with you about it; but I feel so much depressed when I am alone.'

'Try to get over it, dear.'

'I do not wish to get over it, Mariana.'

'Then, my goodness! dear, what is it you want?'

'To be permitted to love.'

'Is that all?'

‘Scarcely all, certainly.’

‘Now, Madonna, I’ll tell you what—you and I will call and see this recreant knight.’

‘Not for the world, Mariana, not for the world!’

CHAPTER XV.

PHILOSOPHY.

MONSIGNORE SAINT-PAUL is not at all satisfied with the state of things we have been describing. Time will not wait in the dominions of his Royal Highness the Grand Duke. His Royal Highness, although making himself vastly popular by the simple means of enjoying himself thoroughly and being pleased to see everybody else do the same, is evidently no politician. The most direct hints of diplomacy are lost upon him. The want of the judicious helpmate intended for him is felt more and more by his former friends. They begin to think, if the Countess Titania is thus to fail them, it may be well to cast about for a substitute. Monsignore has had many anxious interviews with his Excel-

lency the Viscount Malign upon this delicate subject.

One evening, after a modest dinner with his cousin, Julian is persuaded to go forth with him for a stroll in the twilight. Half an hour's walking brings their path along the river-side, and they presently emerge upon the highway. They have been talking philosophy, and they have come to this:

'The influence,' says Julian, 'of woman upon man is the nearest approximation we have to the influence of God upon the soul.'

'God,' answers Monsignore, 'and the devil.'

'Perhaps so. For good, that is, or ill.'

'For good or ill. And what, say you, is the influence of man upon woman?'

'Little else, I think, than the influence of a master. But that is a subject—you will pardon me I am sure—upon which one in your position must be a supreme authority.'

'Yes, we learn a good deal. Apart from the mass of men and of women, the individuals stand related as you say. A woman owns the masterhood of a man as that of the

stronger intelligence ; a man recognises the influence of a woman as that of some emanation from another world.'

' Even amongst the degraded,' says Julian, ' you will see the tender word of a woman composing the almost brutish madness of a husband or a son. When in another sphere of life the object of living is utterly futile, the thoughtlessness of woman is the supreme delight of the thoughtless man. I can fancy that in a higher world—if so it is to be—wherein the disembodied soul of man shall become godlike in its earnestness and repose, the spirit of woman will hover about him like something of the very inner breath of the Divine.'

' This is why, my dear cousin, our angels are all female. Imagine a heavy-heeled doctor of divinity in long clothes and wings !'

' But the angelic pictures you speak of are all young ; does not that confuse the contrast of sex ?'

' Not at all. Paint an angel with the sweet pale face and silver hair of many a grandmother, and why not ?'

‘True,’ replies Julian, ‘most true.’

‘But the influence of woman upon man which you first spoke of is that of the young upon the young; and even our lady painters have never, I think, ventured upon the figure of a moustachio’d captain of dragoons in wings and white.’

‘And devils, I think, are always men.’

‘Typically, yes; except that the exceptionally worst become women. Excuse me for remarking in my turn, Julian, that your vocation must, I think, introduce you to a good many of these.’

‘I hear of them more than I see them, dear cousin. My vocation lies amongst the sick and the sorrowful, and they seldom carry their devilry into sickness and sorrow.’

A carriage overtakes them and is stopped. The Viscount Malign steps out; salutes them: invites them to drive to Mount Medusa and return to town with him in the course of the evening. Monsignore accepts the invitation; Julian concurs. They are soon at the Viscount’s house.

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE SANCTUARY.

It is becoming dusk when they arrive. In obedience to a sign from his master, Keops shows the way to the Sanctuary.

The long gallery is already lighted up to-night. As Monsignore enters, silence seems to fall suddenly upon the whole scene—silent no doubt before, now doubly hushed. As Julian enters, the eyes of the ungracious company along the walls and on the upper vault turn towards him with one accord. As he glances around and above, every successive face he sees is thus regarding him intently. He has bent his head involuntarily to the altar of the faded flowers. He breathes quickly, under the added influence of the vapour of incense. He steps with a feeling of fear upon the icy surface of the floor.

His gaze turns with awe towards the outer chamber beyond the mirrors. Lais approaches him with keen, bright, glowing eyes. Keops has closed the door. The Viscount's footfall is noiseless ; that of Monsignore, and his own, awaken crisp, unnatural echoes.

In the carriage they have been continuing the conversation which had been interrupted. The Viscount seems disposed to renew it again.

‘Sweet Lais,’ he exclaims gaily, ‘what is thine opinion ?’

But the wild creature, in her waywardness, hisses at the hand which he advances to caress her, and would recede from his touch.

‘What, coy ?’ he laughs. ‘Fair mistress, here is a gracious youth seeking counsel of us all. His *credo* is the ever-joyfulness of woman’s love. Fie upon thee, beauty ! I have said it is ever-wilfulness, and thou art my fittest example. Not even a caress, thou wayward, pettish one ? Behold, young sir, the spirit of woman ! Let our pretty Lais be a pretty girl in metamorphosis. You have seen many a pretty toy, never a prettier one than Lais when pleased to gambol. You

have seen many a soft, spoilt child of Nature, never one more spoilt than silk-soft Lais. Which shall it be, my beautiful she-cat ; joyfulness or wayward wilfulness, which shall it be ?'

As if affronted by this raillery, the puma has withdrawn beneath a distant couch, from under which her vicious face peers out with a glare of mischief, which seems, however, to be uncertain of purpose.

Wine is seen on one of the tables. At the invitation of the Viscount, his guests refresh themselves. He also drinks. It is generous wine, of ruby red, the bright blood of the dainty grape ; and as they drink, the Sanctuary acquires a mellow glow of sunshine ; the pictured faces light up with smiles ; the fair ladies in marble, and in the corroded silver, become radiant ; the mimic earth, with its moving light and shadow, is lustrous, as if all night were gone ; the very serpents glitter, as they fling up into the air their roseate spray ; even the faded flowers are less faded ; up in the vault the silver stars twinkle, as if in joy ; down in the depth, far down, other stars shine in the abyss.

‘Cast your eye, young man, upon these fair ladies that stand sentinel so pleasantly at my four corners. They are beautiful women. Cast your eye upon the pair that here uphold the World! Beautiful women! All daintily fashioned. A little less drapery than is customary on your streets; but with no reason to feel ashamed of the lithe limbs and delicately moulded shoulders which Nature so beautifully models — even for your streets. Does it ever occur to you that all this is a snare?’

‘It does not,’ says Julian, boldly. ‘Bewitching face, bewitching form, bewitching soul!’

‘So I have said—a snare.’

‘A snare, then, that is self-snaring, Viscount; for, strange as it seems to most men, the woman may likewise be bewitched. Some even say her fascination is more complete.’ Guilelessly said, or it might be thought he is boasting, scarcely magnanimously, of some triumph of his own. ‘But it is enough for man,’ he adds, ‘to know the witchery of woman, and to believe in that alone. Alas! I know, and I believe.’

‘Only a toy, young sir, only a toy.’

‘But,’ says Monsignore, with his blandest smile, ‘what else is all the world?’

‘Little else,’ answers the Ambassador. ‘Remember the old woman’s jest—“all ends in cradles.” Summer passes into autumn, autumn into the winter of rest; then comes the pretty spring, and Nature is once more in the cradle. Blythe youth, in man and in woman, passes into the mature, the mature into the grey leaf, the grey leaf falls in age; but the bud is in yonder cradle, and blythe youth is twining its hair again. Nations, Empires, Faiths, are but the same; youth, manhood, decline, and again the cradle. Thus viewed, the world is an exquisite toy. What better can all your philosophy make of it? There were old philosophies in the dreamy East which all turned on this; thoughtful old philosophies, evolved from the languid contemplation of unapproachable anchorites, beholding mysterious visions with shut eyes.’

‘But mankind,’ says Monsignore, taking snuff, ‘have never been able to make of such myths anything much more substantial than

the vapours of the brain in which the dreams were pictured.'

'Perhaps not ; but your mankind is itself but such a vapourous dream ; for what is a man but memory ?—But your mankind has a long game yet to play, Monsignore Saint-Paul ; and something may come of it some day. Your philosophy is like all else—spring, summer, autumn, winter, and spring once more in the cradle—nothing else ; a dream of changing cycles, nothing else.'

'But religion——' says Monsignore.

'Religion—pardon me—is but another case in point, perhaps the most notable illustration of all. Religion is but a short cut to the philosophy of the unknown, because it seems unknowable ; and does it not run in cycles ? And is it not ever recurring to the cradle ? Drink more wine, Monsignore ; drink, young sir ; our conversation will flag ; let wine be the cradle of thought, and this is generous wine.'

'But,' says the priest, 'surely man makes progress ?'

'Little that I see, Monsignore. There are increasing numbers of men and women on

the surface of this planet of yours ; and they are able to communicate together more freely ; but what else do you speak of ? The bulk of them, in all lands alike, are just the coarse barbarians that they ever were ; within ten miles of any metropolis of empire there are masses of men and women as hopelessly ignorant of all philosophy, all religion, all progressive knowledge, as are the savages of the far northern steppes, or of the far western forests. The typical peasant of whatever land you may name is the typical peasant of all lands ; and, what is more, of all ages. Not only is there attached to every centre of modern civilisation an uncultured fringe as obscene as, in the days of Charlemagne, of Cæsar, of Sesostris, made the world hideous ; but in what respect are your modern grandees more grand than those ? Here and there you have a handful of men who are learned and polished ; but where was there a time when no such handfuls of men existed just like these ? And in what respect are the men of the present superior to the men of the past ? If in anything, only in the mere superficialities of discovery. You can weigh

the sun; girdle the earth with the electric wire; map out the mountains on the moon; presage the storm; convert fuel into force: but can you make a blade of grass to grow? or trace the tree in the seed? or put your bridle in the north wind's mouth? or scatter the snow? Or can you, more than Socrates could do, divine the thoughts of a man, or interpret the dreams of a woman? By the way, how is our pretty Countess Titania? Yes, fair Lais; so thou has crept hither again. Thy moods have no endurance in them, sweet beauty—beautiful she-cat! Type of womankind, gentle and sleek, soft and loving, wayward and wilful, cunning and cruel; but wayward still, gentle and soft again!’ And Lais licks his hand as he fondles her. ‘Monsignore, how is our charming young friend? I have not seen her lately.’

‘My cousin must answer,’ says the priest.

‘Always kind, and always welcome,’ says Julian.

‘I long to urge upon my cousin,’ says Monsignore, ‘that the young Countess is scarcely in her place at Sweetbriar Gardens.’

‘Scarcely, no doubt; but who shall fathom the whims of a woman?’

‘Surely that is hardly fair,’ says Julian; ‘the graceful presence of the young Countess in the dismal shadows of that dreary field is to me—pardon me, this is generous wine—like a divine presence.’

‘Oh, siren, siren, with thy song so sweet! What sayest thou, Lais, to the divine presence of our pretty Titania?’

‘My young cousin,’ says Monsignore, patting his snuff-box, ‘is susceptible, I think, to woman’s wiles.’

‘Wiles, my dear cousin?’

‘Nay, Monsignore Saint-Paul, you are for once at fault; our young friend is not to be tricked by wiles. There was a beautiful girl who honoured us here that evening when we had the architect.’

‘Miss Madonna, as I have heard,’ says Monsignore; ‘surely, Julian, she is not forgotten?’

‘No, *not* forgotten! Far from forgotten! Viscount, your wine is generous; take pity on me; let me not say what I would wish unsaid.’

‘Speak freely, Julian,’ says Monsignore ;
‘you speak to friends.’

‘I wish Constantine were here. I have longed—as it might seem for years—for ages—to unbosom my secret. Have pity on my sorrows, if I do it now.’

‘Speak freely,’ says Viscount Malign ; ‘I do not war with sorrow, nor with weakness ; but with strength alone—proud strength, and vigorous sin !’

What means this ? There is in the Ambassador’s voice a touch of more than tenderness ; as if in some far-distant home, beyond the reach of sight or speculation—as if at a far-distant time, beyond all echo of tradition—the godlike, in some mystery of dire disaster, had been dissolved and doomed—dissolved into a wreck of godhood not quite lost, doomed to an everlasting task of fierce and painful strife that never shall be quite devoid of pity—a warfare to be waged with pride against the pride of man, with wickedness against his wickedness, even with temptation, ruin, and the laugh of cruelty, against his pomps and vanities, but never, as

God made us all ! with any shameful quality
to vex the suffering or the forlorn, for that it is
a deeper vice of human villany that preys upon
the poor !

CHAPTER XVII.

FLUSHED WITH THE GENEROUS WINE.

‘WITH strength alone, not weakness,’ says the Ambassador, ‘—proud strength and vigorous sin.’

Monsignore says nothing. Sleek Lais has laid her cheek for once upon his knee, and looks up pitifully into his face.

‘One night,’ says Julian dreamily, flushed with the generous wine, ‘—one night I stood with Madonna at a window, looking forth upon the stars. She was very dear to me. I embraced her in some small manner, never having done so before, and conscience stung me—because it never had been done before. So I looked up ashamed. There fell upon me the glance of a dreadful eye—I know not whose. I have been unhappy ever since.’

‘Not long after, I was taken, I know not how, to a gay banquet ; in a novel scene, I know not where. Madonna was with me, but we did not sit together. She sat by a beautiful man, I by a beautiful woman. Next morning I was mad !

‘They sent me to the sea-shore. There I wandered daily on the beach. Always together, two fair spirits haunted me. One was good, one evil. One was Madonna ; one was the beautiful woman of the banquet ; always together. Why was Madonna the good spirit ? God had made her good ; she could not be evil. Why was the other evil ? I could not tell ; she was as lovely as the summer sky ; I could not tell why God had not made her good. Doubtless I did her wrong, for she was very beautiful, and they were always together.

‘The sea-breath revived me, and I came home. They were no longer together. The stranger was gone, and I came home. I went to Madonna. I fell upon my knees ; I held forth my arms to Madonna. We could not speak ; we trembled. We looked out upon the world together, our hearts too full.

And the cold wind swept the trees ; the leaves fell dead. How could our love rekindle in the cold blast amongst the dead leaves falling ? I wept and went away.

‘ I went to my old duty once more. God has given me, I said, this work to do ; I will work while it is day, and when the night cometh let Him do with me as He will.’

‘ Young man,’ whispers the Viscount Malign (does his voice tremble ?) ‘ *you were tempted then no more !*’

‘ I was at peace. My heart was broken, and I was at peace. I sat by the bedside of desolate dying youth. God had made it very beautiful.—Why this waste of beauty, Viscount Malign ?’

‘ It cannot be told.’

‘ The fate of a woman is seen in the mirror which God, or man, or devil, puts into her hand. The glass committed to this poor dying child had been a blurred and broken thing, yielding a blotted and distorted image. As I contemplated this wreck of sweetness, who should come to the death-bed but the beautiful woman of the banquet—the evil spirit of my mad visions by the sea-shore !

But she came now in the likeness of an angel of light! She knelt down by the poor death-bed; sorrowed with the tenderness of a sister; kissed the sunk soiled cheek, threw the mantle from her own shoulders over the miserable bed, thrust all her money into the astonished hand of poverty, and fled away—fled like some bright meteor through the darkness! What more could a goddess do?

‘They were again together. But no longer was one evil and one good. And I wondered no longer; I was lost; I waited.

‘I went again to Madonna, not knowing what to do. Heaven, I said, will point a way when I am lost. We conversed together. I told her of the beautiful spirit by the death-bed-side——’

‘Oh!’ exclaims the Viscount, starting to his feet, ‘fatal—fatal!’

Lais utters a plaintive whine.

Even Monsignore rises from his chair. ‘Go on,’ he says, and his eyes are full of tears, ‘alas, alas! go on.’

‘And as I told her, there came a great bleak wind from the inhospitable pole, shaking the solid world. The whirling snow blinded the

heavens. The shivering trees groaned in an agony. Demons of frost and hunger, darkness, devastation, and despair, screamed in their fury! What could I do? Why should I resist my fate?

‘And again they are always together. Twin sisters now of the beautiful and the good! The one I dare not approach; she is a blessed dream for ever in my sight. The other—Heaven sends her to help me in my service, and her fair presence is the radiance of my world!’

An audible hush flows through the chamber, like a breath of air from some far country, and he is asleep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ARCHITECTURE AGAIN.

THE building of the Abbey Church in Sweetbriar Gardens is progressing satisfactorily, and the time has come for considering the arrangement of the conventual establishment in connection therewith. And now Master Georgius the Architect and Monsignore Saint-Paul the Director have at length come to disagree.

‘Your rooms,’ says Monsignore, ‘seem to me to be made almost as uncomfortable as they possibly can be.’

‘Why, of course!’ exclaims the astonished artist, fixing his glass somewhat indignantly in his eye, ‘what you call uncomfortable I call quaint.’

‘Very possibly I should call it the same; but, my dear sir, *cui bono*?’

‘*Cui bono!*’ answers the architect contemptuously; ‘that’s what all modern people say; that’s the horrible mistake of the whole modern world; we shall never recover the tone of the old men till we get rid of such jargon. Now, just for an instance, imagine the fathers of this Abbey of ours going in for wash-hand-basins!’ He drops his eyeglass in sheer dismay at such an idea.

‘Why not?’

‘Why not? I said wash-hand-basins! and jugs—just think of it!’ says the architect, refixing his glass—‘jugs!’

‘What would you have, Mr. Oldhousen?’

‘A laver, of course.’

‘In what form?’

‘A stone trough, of course; outside the refectory door.’

‘At which gentlemen are to put their heads under the pump, I suppose.’

‘Pump? No! Do you suppose we shall have pumps? They can put their heads into the laver if they want. But I don’t agree with much of that; the old men didn’t encourage any of that unnecessary affectation.’

‘Soap, I suppose, you would interdict.’

‘Well, soap, you know, ain’t architecture; but if I were abbot, they should have very little of it, I can tell you.’ He drops his eyeglass here with a determined air.

‘Well?’

‘Well, I am going in for squints, squinches, and slypes.’

‘Structural matters, I suppose?’

‘Partly; squints I consider to be the very essence of conventual arrangement.’

‘Do you mean haglioscopes?’

‘You may call them what you like, I call them squints in plain aboriginal language. I want everybody to see the altar, you know, from everywhere—dormitory, refectory, solar, cellar, kitchen, squillery, buttery, sewery, turnpike, and bartizan; I don’t mean to let their duty be ever out of their sight, you know. When I think of such an arrangement, Lord! I don’t know that I shan’t go over myself as soon as the country has a decent place like this Abbey for a fellow to go over into.’ The eyeglass is now being refixed in an absent way.

‘Just so. Well? I think I understand you.’

‘Well, I don’t think you do, but never mind. Then I go in for squinches ; they’re structural certainly ; very quaint ; the quaintest thing out. I wouldn’t have a corner without a squinch for anything.’

‘Would you not ?’

‘No ; an architect who don’t use squinches is not an artist at all.’

‘I hope they do no harm at any rate.’

Master Georgius drops his glass, scorning to answer a remark so unbecoming ; and feeling that he can scarcely threaten, even metaphorically, to punch the head of a Prelatic Chaplain of the Vatican, he changes the subject. ‘Perhaps you don’t,’ he says, ‘believe in slypes.’

‘I remember the slype at my college ; a narrow, dirty, disagreeable passage-way ; is that what you mean ?’

‘As for being narrow, that’s the primary charm of such a thing ; and it ought to be crooked if you can get it.’

‘All strait gate, I suppose, and narrow way.’

‘Certainly ; and as for being dirty, that depends upon the weather. The word dis-

agreeable I can't say that I understand. I call our new streets disagreeable if you like—great wide gaping gullets without a bit of quaintness to be had from end to end; everything seen at such a horrible distance, you know. I wouldn't allow any street to be more, if I had my way, than about seven feet wide; and I would have an angle of forty-five degrees at least at every fifty feet.'

'Indeed! and what would become of our carriages, carts, omnibuses?'

'I wouldn't have any, of course; I should soon settle that. The old men hadn't such things.' (Refixing his glass.)

'I see.'

'No you don't; you may fancy you do, but you can't.'

'Just so. What did you say about a bartizan?'

'A bartizan; well, I shall have several, so as to command my slypes. We provide for pouring down melted lead, you know, from the roofs, upon the assailants.'

'What assailants?'

'Why, any assailants; nobody in particular, but anybody that comes. We shall have

riots, you know, before long, as the end of all this.' (Here Master Georgius drops his glass thoughtfully.) 'The modern spirit of the day will be revolting, reacting, and all sorts of things, before we are able, you know, to stand in the ancient ways—any fool can see that; the passions of the mob, you know, are going to be aroused and so on, and then we'll pour melted lead upon their heads, you know, and let fly at them with cross-bows.'

'Cross-bows?'

'Of course: what else would you have?'

(Raising his glass.)

'And pray, my dear Mr. Oldhousen, are all these antiquated provisions really to be made in our Abbey?'

'Antiquated provisions! I suppose you wouldn't object now—just for an instance, you know—to the fathers having tooth-brushes.'

'Most certainly not.'

'Good Lord deliver us! If there's anything that I hate the sight of, it's a tooth-brush.' (Dropping his glass.)

'But why, my dear sir?'

‘Why? Good gracious! A man who is capable of using a tooth-brush is capable of—what shall I say?—capable of having his walls papered—or his boots blacked!’

‘I see clearly what you mean.’

‘No, indeed you don’t; but never mind. I’m thinking of pulling down the tower—so far as it’s built, you know—and shifting it to the other angle of the ground. Then I shall build it square—I hate round towers; they’re abominable.’

‘I do not understand you.’

‘And I mean to have it out of axis a little; there are several examples, you know; so much more quaint.’

‘I see. Accidental eccentricities, no doubt, arising out of the circumstances of building at different periods.’

‘I never inquire what it arises out of, if it’s quaint. Some people are insane enough to call all quaintness eccentricity,’ says the architect, refixing his glass.

‘No doubt. But why, my dear Mr. Oldhousen, remove the tower?’

‘For strategical reasons; I thought you would have seen that. I’m going in for

defending the whole place, you know, against the mob. I told you I shall have lots of bartizans ; and I shall have crenelles everywhere for bowmen. Every blessed gargoyle in the buildings will do for the boiling water and melted lead business. And then, to crown all, I shall go in for a catapult' (dropping his glass) 'on the top of the tower.'

'To throw stones?'

'Yes ; granite paving-stones will do capitally. And then you see the use of having it at the corner. I shall be able to command Sweetbriar Gardens in one direction, and White Sparrow Street both ways in another, and if necessary, I can let fly over the opposite houses.'

'A most ingenious idea.'

'No, it isn't indeed ; I call it—or some people would—only common-sense.'

'And pray, Mr. Oldhousen, how are my poor simple brethren to be accommodated in the midst of all this warlike preparation? Do you expect them to walk about in shirts of mail?'

'If they begin to wear shirts of any sort,'

answers the artist, refixing his eyeglass, 'they may have shirts of mail for me. My brother Theo has discarded linen long ago, and he finds it very handy now that he's got used to it. I shall do the same as soon as this country is worth doing anything in. I mean to go in for standing like a stock in the ancient ways, as soon as I see any ancient ways to stand in ; but at present everything is so disgustingly modern ! I mean, however, to make All Saints and Angels something like a beginning, at all events, if I can get the details, you know, the little things, sufficiently—what shall I say ?'

'Sufficiently uncomfortable ?'

'Well, so far as a modern idea can represent an old one, the phrase may stand ; or we may say—mortifying.'

'Of course you will have no glass in our windows ?'

'Not in the Abbey ; only in the church.'

'Fires ?'

'One. I think I'll have a dossel in the hall, you know, the refectory ; against the wall, you know, with a louvre over it. I'm going to vault the hall in stone, and have a

larder to hang the bacon in. But, I say, I'm going in for one sort of luxury.'

'What is that?'

'You needn't be afraid, it's not modern; a paradise and some carols.' The architect drops his eyeglass very quietly this time.

'I don't quite understand you now.'

'I didn't suppose you would. Well, the paradise is a private chamber or favourite sanctum—I don't mean comfortable, you know—O Lord no! but it's for the abbot, and it has a squint in it. And then the carols are little pigeon-holes of boxes or bays for the retirement of the brethren; and a squint in every one of them.'

'I think I should vastly prefer, my dear Mr. Oldhousen, a few simple modern chambers for the brethren, with a neat paper on the walls.' The architect stands aghast.

'Go on; don't forget register-stoves.'

'And register-stoves; and certainly no smoky chimneys.'

'Pray go on, do; and whitewashed ceilings——'

'Yes; and dry boarded floors——'

'Good gracious! pray go on,' says Mr.

Georgius, raising his glass; 'and two inch moulded sashes, double hung, and glazed with the best crown glass free from flaws——'

'Yes; and gas-fittings.'

'And marble chimney-pieces——'

'Yes, as they are so cheap.'

'And four-panel deal doors, with butt-hinges and mortise-locks——'

'Certainly.'

'Certainly!—he says certainly!' (Dropping his glass in horror.)

'And ventilators in the chimney flues——'

This is too much for the distracted artist. His brain whirls. Grasping his burning forehead with his trembling hands, he utters a wild cry!

'Say you stop short,' he exclaims, trying in vain to refix his eyeglass, 'at chimney-glasses; for heaven's sake say you stop short at them!'

'I think we may do without those, Mr. Oldhousen.'

'The gods and little fishes be praised! we have at length reached the limit of human infirmity.'

So saying, Master Georgius throws his eye-

glass over his shoulder, and abruptly rushes from the ground ; and it need not be denied that he has to pause for a moment in his flight homeward to recuperate at the Sun in Heaven.

CHAPTER XIX.

BEAUTY STRUCK DOWN.

THIS conversation has taken place in a temporary wooden hut upon the building ground, called the office of the clerk of works, vacated for the occasion by its ordinary occupant. As Monsignore Saint-Paul now goes forth—and it must be acknowledged that it is with a smile upon his pleasant countenance—he encounters Sergeant Jollybuff, and, strange to say, with no smile on his.

‘What is the matter, Sergeant?’

‘Oh, sir! haven’t you heard?’

‘I have heard no bad news.’

‘She’s struck down in a fever fit, and the doctor says she can’t be moved!’

‘Who is this?’

‘The beautiful dear, the beautiful lady!’

‘The Countess Titania?’

‘Yes, indeed, indeed; poor love, poor love, poor love! And she’s not used to our ways; and I know she’s took the fever here. And that the Lord should strike her down and spare a thing like me! The beautiful lady—a thing like me!’ Tears are running down the veteran’s honest cheeks. ‘A thing like me!’

‘Show me to the place.’

An upper chamber; in one of the meanest of the all-mean houses; squalor and dirt everywhere; laid on the mere ruin of a truckle-bed; trembling and ghastly; with stertorous breathing, beating temples, all dishevelled hair; her beautiful bosom uncovered in their haste; her bright eyes wild; her sweet lips parched and quivering!

And, pale and haggard as she, Julian Saint-Paul stoops upon his knee by her dreadful bedside.

Women, frantic with amazement, stand in the room; others on the stair. The old soldier has gone for medicine. Hastily directing the ecclesiastic to the room, he has run off again on his errand.

Monsignore enters in haste; pauses in horror; in horror kneels upon the floor, and prays to God! He needs no breviary, but, amidst the kneeling wailing women, pours forth his plaint in piteous accents. She hears his voice; recovers her sight; looks around——

‘Oh, Monsignore! save me, save me!’

He continues his prayer—‘have pity, oh, have pity!’

She sees the other; grasps his hand; presses it to her lips, to her bosom——

‘Oh, I am happy! Let me die like this!
Too great a blessing for a wasted life!’

CHAPTER XX.

COUNT OBERON AMAZED.

COUNT OBERON is sent for. He is an amiable young man, but it must be confessed that human patience is not a little at fault when he looks upon his sister lying in the garret of Sweetbriar Gardens.

How did this happen? he demands. What brought her here? Who brought her here? In the name of amazement! what does it mean? Has the devil turned the world upside town?

No, the honest Sergeant explains; the devil has not turned the world upside down; this world of Sweetbriar Gardens, just as you see it, is the right side up, the more's the pity; very much the same as usual, if people only knew it.

The handsome Count addresses the Ser-

geant in the street amidst a little crowd of the Sweetbriar Gardeners. He has arrived in a two-wheel cab at high speed; the cabman having had some little difficulty in discovering the place. He has alighted in the midst of this crowd. He has picked his way up the stair of the house in something like a dream—a confoundedly disagreeable and ill-smelling dream! He has seen his sister lying all in disorder in an indescribable place, with perfectly indescribable people about her! Becoming somewhat incoherent, the doctor has persuaded him to withdraw. He always obeys doctors, and he has withdrawn. How he has got downstairs he has no idea. But here he is in the midst of the crowd again in something that bears a faint and disagreeable resemblance to the open air; and it is in these incomprehensible circumstances that he essays conversation with this remarkable old fellow with a wooden leg, a hook hand, and one eye.

‘In the name of God above!’ shouts the handsome young gentleman, to the amusement not a little of the Sweetbriar Gardeners, ‘where the dooce have I got to?’

CHAPTER XXI.

WOMAN'S HEART.

MONSIGNORE SAINT-PAUL has gone off on a mission of his own. Shocked beyond measure as he has been, he has recovered himself. That the young lady is dangerously ill, is but too plain ; the proper measures must be taken. Monsignore is a man who thinks with promptitude, acts with decision.

‘Where,’ he says to himself, ‘where are our fine lady friends now, my poor child ? If we ask for one woman amongst them all to sit by your sad bedside, where shall we find her ? “Oh, horrible place ! Oh, terrible infection ! Oh, the inexpressible trouble—the scandal ! Not but that we all pity the charming Countess ! Oh dear, yes ! she was a delightful creature. We only wish—you can’t imagine how much we wish—we could

do anything to oblige her. But just think of it! How the poor stupid thing could have been so indiscreet as to go amongst such *canaille*! What could she expect? Who could imagine anything else in the world, but that she should catch something dreadful? It is only to be hoped she has not infected any of us, or any of our poor dear boys and girls! We must have every one of them looked to at once, and vaccinated, or whatever other horrid bore of an operation it may be!"

'And yet,' he continues, 'yet we must have a woman. My young cousin is sublime, but we must have a woman. Servants we can get in plenty, but we must have a friend, a sister. I think I know of *one*. I can but try.'

To the Park. The early summer sunshine is lying bright and sweet upon the sward, playing amongst the trees, gleaming in gladness even upon the dusty road. He has to inquire for the house. At last he finds it. He is shown into the drawing-room, and his card is carried to the lady.

Madonna trembles as she looks at the name. What can this be? Is he the mes-

senger of some fresh calamity? Can it be, on the contrary, peace? He is no longer an enemy now, she has heard, but a friend. Perhaps it may be a joyful message that he brings at last. He is well known to be the most amiable of men.

As he rises, upon her entering the room, it is impossible but to see that he is agitated. In an instant Madonna has despaired. But she has despaired before. And she has called up all her courage before. She calls up all her courage now.

There is no smile upon his face. He takes her hand in both of his. He will not be seated. He begs pardon, but he is in haste.

Something dreadful has occurred at last, she thinks. But she only all the more commands her courage.

‘I come,’ he says, not without emotion, ‘as a suppliant for most unusual grace. Unless I am mistaken in my estimate of human kindness, and of the magnanimity which is still with us the image of the lost Divine, I shall not appeal to you in vain. You know who I am?’

‘Has anything,’ she murmurs, ‘—anything happened?’

‘No; as to *himself* be perfectly assured.’ So gently said!

Madonna bursts into tears. The overstrained nerves have yielded, if not to the stress, to its withdrawal.

‘Thank God!’ she cries. ‘Then nothing else can move me.’

Her secret she has confessed again.

The priest stands erect, calm, jubilant. The colour returns to his face, the smile to his lips. He hands her to a chair, seats himself by her side.

‘You have never seen Sweetbriar Gardens?’ he says, almost gaily.

‘Never. He would not allow me to go when he was—was well; and now that he is so troubled, I feel that I ought not to intrude upon him.’

‘This has been scarcely judicious. Where a man like my cousin is, there a woman like yourself ought to be, by his side.’ So frankly, kindly spoken! ‘He is no perverse boy; you are no thoughtless maiden. Your path is his; his task is yours.’

‘ Bless you, sir, for what you say ! I have had no one to advise me. I am motherless, fatherless ; my guardian, kind as he is, is scarcely an adviser for a girl.’

‘ It is my profession, my daughter, to advise all. You are aware, perhaps, that such a man as my cousin must be admired by women ?’

Madonna can scarcely answer this.

‘ All women whose homage is worthy must yield it to the man who is of a generous heart. My cousin’s first love, it is easy to see, will be his last ; but nevertheless——’

‘ Pardon me, dear sir ; I am but a girl, like others ; but do not suppose me to be so childish as to grudge to my sex the joy of—adoring Julian Saint-Paul !’ For once the gentle Madonna is no doubt a little enthusiastic, but there is a subtle something in the words and in the manner of the priest that challenges the confidence of the friendless, and promises help to the unhappy.

‘ You are right, my child. And this is my mission. Incredible as it may seem, the Countess Titania——’ He pauses ; watches her countenance.

‘Yes,’ she says, ‘I have heard of her. I am acquainted with her—a little.’

‘The Countess Titania lies in mortal sickness at Sweetbriar Gardens. By whatever impulse led—but by no impulse, my daughter, devoid of womanly charity—she has been a frequent visitor to the wretched poor of that Heaven-forgotten spot.’

She watches his face; he is in earnest—she cannot be mistaken.

‘In the course of her ministrations she has been suddenly struck down with—I must not disguise it—a dangerous fever. She cannot be removed.’

‘And Julian is in attendance upon her?’

‘He is.’

‘And it is for love—for love of him!’

‘Alas! it is for love of him.’

‘May I go to her? May I nurse her—for her love? If she is to die, may we die together?’

‘I fear, my daughter, I fear there is no one else to whom I can appeal.’

‘Appeal! No; no appeal; I am ready; it is my duty, my privilege, my desire; I have been too long away. I remember when

he told me of her visit to the dying girl. Oh! my heart was pained instead of pleased. How mistaken! pained and not pleased. And thus I drove him away and was ashamed to follow! I, who, to please him, to win his praise, would—but what more than she did could I have done?’

‘It was done, believe me, in simple woman’s charity; it was Heaven’s act, even by the hand of an unthinking woman. It was poor Titania’s box of spikenard—all that she had.’

‘Monsignore Saint-Paul, I will at once go with you to Sweetbriar Gardens. You will explain to my uncle if I do not return; I may have to stay.’

‘And yet,’ says Monsignore, recalled to a sense of prudence by the more collected tone of Madonna’s last words, ‘and yet I think your uncle ought to be consulted first.’

‘Oh no; wherever Julian Saint-Paul is, there would my uncle wish me to be. It is quite unnecessary; let us go. But I will leave a note.’

This is the note:

‘DEAREST UNCLE,

‘I have gone to help Julian at Sweetbriar Gardens. He is nursing the Countess Titania, who has been suddenly taken ill there. How dreadful! I know you would wish me to go to him, and to her. You liked her very much. Polly has the keys.’

CHAPTER XXII.

THE NURSE.

‘MADONNA!’ says Julian in surprise.

‘Yes, dear Julian; I have come to be with you. Your cousin was so good as to let me know, and he has returned with me. What a dreadful place!’

The invalid opens her eyes languidly, and smiles. ‘So you have got a nurse for me, doctor; thank you all so much; I shall be better soon; but you must not kiss me, nurse; I think I did wrong to kiss poor Mary Maloney’s little boy two or three days ago—the little boy that died, you know, yesterday; so you must not kiss me, for fear you might catch it too.’

But Madonna stoops over her; kisses her again and again. ‘Oh, what a dreadful place!’ she cries, ‘what a dreadful place!’

‘I am accustomed to it now, nurse dear ; I thought it at first so very shocking, but I like it now.’

Madonna says no more. There is no time to be wasted. A few words with Julian—very businesslike words with the doctor—and she takes the command.

Meanwhile the sick lady’s servant has arrived. It is her own maid, and she has been a favourite. She has come helter-skelter, just as she was, almost frantic with distress, Count Oberon having fetched her. She brings with her eau-de-Cologne, pomatum, a brush and comb, tooth powder, a hand-glass whereby one is enabled to see one’s back hair, an embroidered night-dress, and a pair of slippers. She has been reproaching herself all the way for having been so stupid as not to think of the dressing-case and a bath-towel. Hair-pins, she reflects, a wash-hand-basin, a needle and thread, and a pair of scissors, thank God ! she can get anywhere.

‘You’ll find it a devil of a place,’ says Count Oberon ; ‘can’t think how my sister could have got there.’

‘I shan’t mind the place, sir ; I’m used to

them places, sir ; and if it's good enough for my lady, sir, it's good enough for me.'

But when she is deposited at the door, human nature in my lady's own maid is found to have for once got beyond the influence of all sentimental considerations.

'No, if you please, sir ! Go into that 'orrid 'ouse amongst such 'orrid wretches I will *not* !—It ain't that I don't value my place, sir, which it is a good place ; but I've said I won't—and I *won't* !'

'That's right, mum,' remarks a male native ; 'stand up for the airystocracy, mum.'

'Go 'long with ye !' says a female native ; 'sure it's the kind lady she was to the poor ; and the back of me hand to ye for a paltry baggage !'

This strong expression of opinion meets with universal approval, and, the Count having gone upstairs with his arms full of the paraphernalia of the dressing-room, a variety of observations are made upon the personal appearance and probable character of my lady's own maid which are distressing to hear. It is in vain that she appeals to the cabman ; the broad grin upon his ruddy

countenance only testifies to his enjoyment of the scene. It is in vain that she appeals to a policeman who is guarding the door ; he stolidly replies that it is all right. Presently Count Oberon reappears. The orders now are to bring bedding and linen, nothing more ; and Madonna has made a list of it as calmly as if she were reckoning with the family laundress.

‘ Dear nurse, how nice you are ! ’ says the invalid. Presently she falls asleep.

They take the opportunity of clearing the room, cleansing it so far as possible, and, bringing in some fresh furniture which the Sergeant has purchased, including pieces of carpet with bright red roses and bright green leaves, a hearth-rug with a royal Bengal tiger reposing in the forest, and a chimney-glass in a massive gold frame. The Sergeant is determined that the beautiful lady shall have every chance of recovery that voluptuous surroundings can afford.

The Countess Titania lies very ill indeed. Eminent physicians have been called in. They have had the house emptied of its tenants ; its rooms cleansed to the uttermost

corner, and whitewashed; the stair covered with carpet to prevent noise; the street covered with straw; and the lady's beautiful hair cut off. The ordinary medical attendant and the nurse possess their perfect confidence; and everything is going on as well as could be wished in the dreadful circumstances. The Sergeant is on duty night and day, and preserves peace in the Gardens as peace was never known to reign in them before. But the Countess Titania lies very ill indeed, and dreams incessantly.

'Nurse,' she says, 'I love you so. What is your name?'

'My name is Madonna, dear.'

'I think I know the name; I had a sister of that name—I think it was a sister; have you a sister?'

'No, I never had a sister.'

'Then you must be mine.'

'Indeed I will.'

'And when I get better——'

'Yes, dear, yes.'

'What was I saying?'

'I am to be your sister, dear, your sister.'

'But you are the doctor's sister.'

‘ Oh no, I am not the doctor’s sister.’

‘ I thought you were. What are you then to the doctor ?’

‘ A very old friend, dear.’

‘ Oh yes, how nice you are ! have you a sister ?’

‘ No, dear, I never had a sister.’

‘ Then you must be mine.’

CHAPTER XXIII.

SOCIETY TALK.

SOCIETY has soon come to know about this extraordinary misadventure of poor dear Titania's.

‘How shocking!’

‘Shocking indeed, dear!’

‘And how did it happen, dear?’

‘Nobody knows, dear. Took a fancy to what they call district visiting, I believe—I don’t know what horrid thing it is.’

‘Oh! I know; I am a district visitor myself at our place in the country. Oh yes, you go into all the cottages, dear, and give the poor people petticoats, and coals, and half-crowns, and that sort of thing, out of the parish.’

‘Do you really? Well, the poor dear took a fancy to that; and so one day—By the

way, they do say there was a handsome doctor——'

'Really?' (In a whisper.)

'So I've heard; but pray don't mention my name, dear.'

'Oh dear no! you may rely upon me.'

'Well, dear, all at once one day she fell into a swoon; in one of the cottages, I suppose, where she had been distributing the coals or whatever it was.'

'I see; probably some smell, dear.'

'I shouldn't wonder, dear; I think it is very likely. Well, of course the handsome doctor——'

'Really! You astonish me!'

'At all events, there she is, dear, and can't be moved.'

'The doctor in attendance, of course.'

'Oh yes; and his wife——'

'No!'

'So they say, dear.'

'It is too horrid! And where is the place?'

'Somewhere over the water, near the Archbishop's — a place called Sweetbriar something; I remember the name because I *am* so fond of sweetbriar.'

‘Sweetbriar; I shall remember the name. Poor thing! but it may not be all true, you know, dear; the world is so very censorious—is it not, dear? But I can *not* get over the doctor’s *wife*.’

‘No, dear, nor anybody else; let us hope——’

‘Yes, dear, we will. One ought to leave a card, don’t you think?’

‘If one could find the place.’

‘Oh! I shall find it. I owe dear Mrs. Primate a call, and I shall ask her. Sweetbriar what, did you say?’

‘I think it was Sweetbriar Garden, or Grove, or something pretty like that—I know it was.’

‘What a nice name! Well, poor dear! she might be worse off than amongst sweetbriar and that sort of thing in the country; I think it *is* such a bore to be ill in town; I hope she’ll get better, poor dear! I shall be sure to find out the place and leave a card.’

‘You’ll let me know, dear, won’t you, all about it?’

‘Oh yes, dear; you may rely upon me.’

So in another quarter——

‘What the dooce is this about Countess Tit?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Laid up in a back slum somewhere, with a fever.’

‘Back slum?’

‘Yes, by Jove! somewhere over the water.’

‘Over the brandy-and-water, you mean, old fellow.’

‘Pon my honour it’s true!’

‘Get out!’

‘Well, old fellow, I can only give it you as I got it. You know Monsignore Saint-Paul?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, whether it was for poor Tit’s sins, or what it was for, I don’t know—but Monsignore seems to have sent her over the water somewhere to play Lady Bountiful amongst the riff-raff.’

‘Ah! don’t believe it; don’t believe Tit would be such a fool.’

‘Well, that’s how I get it. At any rate, she goes about kissing the babies and that

sort of thing—she's not half a bad-hearted creature——'

'I say, tell us about something else.'

'Upon my honour! I give it you exactly as I had it of Tomkins.'

'Tomkins has dreamt it. Never mind, go on, old fellow, if it's any relief to your mind.'

'I don't care what you may say, she's a pretty woman, and I won't hear any harm of her.'

'I should be devilish sorry, old chap, to say a word of the sort; but when it comes to being sent over into the slums to kiss dirty babies for her sins—gad! I think that's coming it rather too strong.'

'Well, you have it as I have it.'

'Go on, old chap, gee up!'

'Well, I suppose she got it off one of these babies.'

'Got what off?'

'Measles, or small-pox, or something.'

'The dooce!'

'Yes, by Jove! and there she is, with her head shaved, lying in a hay-loft or something of that kind, Tomkins says, and not allowed to be moved.'

'And what does Ob say?'

‘ Haven’t seen him for a week.’

‘ It’s a plant. Ob’s got into Queer Street, depend upon it.’

‘ No, I don’t think that. I should know it if he had.’

So in yet another quarter——

‘ And how is our pretty Countess, Mon-signore ?’

‘ Very, very ill, Viscount.’

‘ You see her daily ?’

‘ I do. A wreck to make the gods shed tears !’

‘ I trust she is well attended.’

‘ All is done that can be.’

‘ And your cousin ?’

‘ Day and night keeping watch, calm and silent.’

‘ And the lady ?’

‘ Like himself ; and tender as a sister. The spectacle, Viscount Malign, is one to reconcile a man to the world.’

‘ And yet the world is dancing nightly.’

‘ Yes.’

‘ The Virtues in the shadow—the Vices in the sun.’

‘It is into the shadow that the eye of Heaven is turned.’

‘You say well, Monsignore; they are but gnats that dance in the sun.’

And so once more——

‘Listen, fair Lais, and weep! Our pretty Titania, timid and trembling, looks, alas! into the mouth of the ever-open grave. Beauty is no coin to offer for a ransom. Grace and gaiety are lost in the gloom. Laughter and song are hushed in the thick night-air. Love is but a dream.

‘But by her side the same Love stands, solicitous and yet serene. And by *his* side—still Love, and still the same. Many waters, many waters—cannot quench Love.

‘Were it not for this, where would the wide world be? Is it to sing and dance, to hunt the slipper and kiss in the ring, that men and women live, and have lived, and are yet to live, the cradle ever replenished? Is it for frivolous joy, and shallow sorrow to give joy a zest, that the green trees grow, and the waters run, and the clouds are arrayed in the sky? Is it for the sake of a laugh, and a

tear as a foil to the laugh, that the great sun gleams, and the soft moon, and the restless seas sweep round and round the land ?

‘Is it for only vanity Heaven smiles, Hell frowns; the angels watch, the tempters lie in wait?—these mighty men of mark and metal crush the nations with their axe; these winning women in their sprightly bud and luscious bloom ensnare and conquer?—these ever-flowing streams of life, from mystery past to mystery to come, pursue their unintelligible path?—these bright stars shine above; this depth below lies dim and undiscoverably void?—these ever-withering flowers sleep on the shrine of death; this ever-issuing offering of blood rises into the ever-throbbing air in incense fragrant with the sickly breath of hope defeated and defeated still, of resignation purposeless and pain without reward ?

‘Is it for storm or calm the world revolves ! —for riot or repose the generations roll?—for hate or love ?

‘*For love !*

‘She was a wise old woman, Lais, whom

I sat by in the waggon. "And it all ends in cradles!"

'My poor Titania! And we thought the sawdust had all run out of thy doll! Nay, nay, thou shalt live yet! thou shalt be happy; the mark of early death is not upon thy brow, I know; nor that of futile life. Courage! Let us hear what our Grand Duke has to say.'

CHAPTER XXIV.

H.R.H. RECEIVES INTELLIGENCE.

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS presides at his Council board. His responsible Ministers are much more complaisant than they used to be. He chooses his own cigars without asking their opinion. His taste in Burgundy is his own again. The matrimonial fiasco has brought out parts in his Royal Highness which had scarcely been allowed to him. Always polite, always considerate, and never intellectual; a little too jovial at times for his physicians and his bishop, but more and more a gentleman as he is more and more encouraged and trusted, his Royal Highness will be a model prince some day—if he happens to marry judiciously and to acquire with grey hair the discretion of mature age.

But, as for marrying, he has let it be

known that that shall be his own affair. 'I mean to wait,' he says mysteriously to his more particular friends; 'I know what I am about. She shall have her fling, begad! in her own way; it will all come right in the end.'

As he is sitting in this presidential chair of his, thinking of nothing in particular, a letter is brought in. It is for his Royal Highness personally. He apologises and reads the letter.

'Messieurs! Urgent private affairs, begad! Cannot help it; shall be absent for a week; must do the best you can. Shall travel *incognito*. Nobody need know anything about it. Home in a week. Start to-night.'

Accustomed to the royal style by this time, the assembled Government gather, without further explanation, that his Royal Highness proposes to go forth of his dominions for a few days on private business. And, contemplating the royal features at the moment, they see quite plainly that what is proposed is meant to be carried out.

The Home Minister looks at the Foreign Minister.

The Foreign Minister looks at the War Minister.

The War Minister looks at the Minister of Justice.

The Minister of Justice looks at the Minister of Education, who is the Bishop.

All the Ministers look at his Royal Highness, who is reading his letter a second time—a third time—they are not quite sure but he reads part of it a fourth time.

His Royal Highness touches the gong on the table; orders the page to order his valet to pack his trunks for a journey; and further to order his dinner to be advanced a couple of hours, and his travelling carriage to be at the door half an hour after—sharp. The Ministers are amazed at last: only half an hour for his dinner? Depend upon it he will take his bottle of Burgundy with him!

If any technical opposition were intended to be offered to the somewhat unconstitutional project of his Royal Highness, a moment's whispered conversation amongst the responsible Ministers, as the Prince now leaves the

chamber, sets it quite at rest. There happens to be a grand design on the carpet to establish a tax on high heels. Statisticians and philosophers declare that it will be a highly popular tax, and highly productive ; inasmuch as every man will be possessed of a desire to stand taller than his neighbour, every woman taller than every other woman, and every wife taller than her husband. His Royal Highness, with a respectable oath, has in short damned the idea as preposterous. Now is the time to get it carried out. His Royal Highness will put his veto in commission during his absence, and a week or ten days will do the business. It is unanimously decided that his Royal Highness shall be offered ten days' leave of absence.

CHAPTER XXV.

URGENT PRIVATE AFFAIRS.

MONSIEUR SAINT-PAUL is seated solitary by his window, looking forth into a quiet garden, and contemplating the vanity of all things. He has given orders that he shall on no account be disturbed for an hour or two. He hears a very considerable disturbance in the entrance-hall without. Some one has come in and seems to be turbulent, and turbulence is as unusual as it would be unseemly in such a house.

‘I *will* see him, begad!’

‘Very sorry, your Royal Highness, but my lord’s orders are preemptory.’

‘Take in my name.’

‘Couldn’t, your Royal Highness, for the world.’

‘Then do it for this;’ and there is no doubt

placed in the servitor's hands the world-conquering silver key—or golden one.

Monsignore has opened his door himself by this time, and now admits the visitor.

'I am glad—most glad to see you,' says he; and as the door is closed upon them he puts his hand on the royal shoulder and frankly exclaims, 'You are a good fellow!'

'Couldn't allow myself to wait a single day; cab at the door; no ceremony; come along; jump in; tell the cabby where to go.'

'Stay,' says Monsignore; 'one moment's conversation first. You must expect to see her very much changed.'

'Afraid I must; can't be helped; thought it might do her good to see that we don't forget her; what's this the Viscount says about her lying at such poor quarters?'

The circumstances are explained.

'Good; can't be helped; it will do her all the more pleasure to see that she is not neglected; impatient to be off.'

They ascend the stairs. The air within the house, pervaded by the disinfectants of the physicians, seems almost fresh air after that of the street without, but the squalor is

still ever present. They are admitted to the room without interval. She is asleep. The good woman who waits in the adjoining garret is not of polished manners; and it may be a further excuse for her admission of gentlemen into a fine lady's sick-room with so little ceremony, that she has always taken Monsignore for a physician.

But the sick lady is asleep. The doctor—the doctor in Sweetbriar Gardens—has gone downstairs, the attendant says, to lay down a bit, and the other lady is alone with her.

But the woman, in her hasty glance of observation before admitting the visitors, has not observed that the other lady likewise is asleep.

Not in unrest, either of them. Not in pain. Both in the placid slumber of the gentle and the sad. It were sacrilege to awaken them.

Like sisters, asleep together. Both pale; both their faces sunken with care; both worn with sorrow. Which is the fairer, sweeter, face, no man could help inquiring of himself in this silent contemplation; and

perhaps no man could so readily answer which it is.

In a few moments, in the undisturbed silence, the invalid, without opening her eyes, speaks—in her sleep.

‘Listen, Madonna, dear,’ she says, ‘look there! Is it not good of him to come so far? I don’t deserve it.’

‘Begad! you do, though,’ says one of the strangers bluntly, but in a whisper; ‘or I shouldn’t be here;’ a sound constitutional observation to fall from the lips of one in his position.

‘Hush!’ says the other inaudibly, but scarcely without a smile.

‘I did not intend, dearest Madonna,’ continues the sleeper, ‘to steal away your lover; indeed I did not intend it; he is all yours, sweet Madonna, none mine—none ever of mine. Believe me, I would not steal away your lover.’

‘Certainly not,’ whispers his Royal Highness; ‘plenty of your own; as many as you like, begad! any day.’

‘Hush!’

‘I won’t deny that I loved him, dearest;

very much indeed ; who could help it ?' The sleeper opens her eyes.

His Royal Highness makes a profound bow, and smiles his most pleasant smile.

'Is this reality, or am I dreaming ?'

The question awakens her nurse.

'Why, dear sister,' says Madonna, alarmed, 'is anything the matter ?' For her position does not bring the visitors at once into her view.

'I think I am dreaming, dear Madonna. I saw you with your lover standing, both majestically, beside my couch (I thought I was at home); and you said to me, with all your kindness but with sorrow, that I had—— But I won't tell you more.'

'Why not ?'

'It is better not to tell you. But I thought then I saw your lover change into mine—for I know he loves me——'

'Loves you alone, I hope,' says Madonna.

'I think so.'

'Most assuredly,' says his Royal Highness, stepping forward and bowing very low to Madonna, who has risen in some trepidation from her chair ; 'dooeed fond of her, upon

my honour! One sees a great many fine women, begad! but two finer women than—I beg pardon, I'm delighted to see you both looking so well—so extremely well.'

Monsignore thinks it expedient now to come to the help of Royalty, a little confused. He explains that the Prince, immediately on receiving intelligence of the serious illness of the Countess Titania, has come on this journey to see her in person; that he himself is beyond measure pleased with the change for the better in the patient's condition; and that he is sure his Royal Highness joins him in expressing the hope that, by the blessing of Heaven, this improvement may be the beginning of a speedy recovery.

For the invalid has certainly improved vastly since yesterday; and Madonna has it to explain in her turn that in fact the improvement has taken place since last she fell asleep. Her illness, it would seem, has passed its crisis in the interval, and has entered suddenly upon a new and happier phase, as such illnesses sometimes do.

Monsignore now thinks it prudent, as it no doubt is, to withdraw with his companion,

and the two ladies are left alone. Within half an hour, Julian, refreshed by slumber, comes to confirm the good news of the improved condition of his patient. The brother in his turn calls before long, to receive the welcome intelligence; and he is doubly delighted to be told that within so many days, by means of special provision for transit, he may expect to see his sister at home once more.

On reaching the street again, his Royal Highness observes, standing sentinel at the door, a man in a sort of undress military uniform, having one eye, one arm, and one leg, and carrying a knapsack on his back. This man salutes him, knowing by some mysterious instinct, apparently of a highly sensitive nature, that he is a soldier.

‘Who the dooce,’ says the Prince, being in a jocular humour, ‘are you?’

Monsignore Saint-Paul, being also in a pleasant humour, introduces him in form, and not without commendation, as The Sergeant Jollybuff.

His Royal Highness bows to The Sergeant Jollybuff.

Monsignore informs the Sergeant that the gentleman has come two thousand miles post haste to see the sick lady ; and that he has found her, by God's blessing, very much recovered within the last hour or two, and the crisis of her illness past.

The Sergeant divines the truth in an instant. There stand around a considerable number of inquisitive Sweetbriar Gardeners, not all, as it happens, of the female sex.

'Boys!' shouts the Sergeant, 'three cheers for *true love*!'

The bystanders divine the secret no less promptly. The three cheers are given, by men and women alike ; and one cheer more ; and the Sergeant throws up his cap in the air.

'Why don't ye cheer, ye lubber?' says the Sergeant to the cabman ; for the grandees have kept him waiting.

'It ain't in my line, guv'nor,' replies cabby, 'not having no voice ; but I wishes them no less joy, I don't.'

'For good luck !' says the Sergeant, opening his knapsack ; and he distributes its contents amongst the crowd.

His Royal Highness remarks that he has no change except in foreign money, but if they don't mind——

They don't mind a bit.

‘Now, attention!’ shouts the Sergeant;
‘not a penny on it is to go to the public-house!’

Perhaps it does not go ; perhaps it does.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FOREIGN GAME.

THE great Ditchwater dispute still rages as fiercely as ever. The high-nosed and of course high-spirited Earl has imported his wild boar and his wolves. They have been carefully domiciled in a secret haunt in his Lordship's woods, the head-keeper and his assistants being strictly enjoined to say nothing, even in their deepest cups, to indicate the whereabouts of the foreign game. All that is publicly known is that the animals are full-grown and ferocious, and that the process of hunting them is to be deferred until such time as they shall have begun to people the forest with their grisly kind.

The Reverend John Jacob Saint-Paul, rector of the parish, is as forcible in his observations as ever. In private conver-

sation, in his sermons, and in letters to the county papers, he pours forth an uninterrupted stream of invective. Even in reading the lessons of the day, and in reciting the prayers, he makes significant pauses at incidental phrases, and looks around him with an expressive glance. At the well-known words, 'murder and sudden death,' he utters almost a scream of despair.

One evening in the summer twilight he happens to be walking along a secluded road called Laggard Lane, deeply engaged in thought, with his hands behind his back, and admiring, as he is fond of doing, the tints of the sunset sky ; when he is accosted in the dull light by a strange dog.

The parson is a lover of dogs ; he has a habit of conversing with even strange dogs.

'Well, Pincher,' says he to the animal, trotting along by his side, 'and whose doggie are you ?'

The dog is about the size of a small sheep-dog, of a grey colour, with a long nose and a short bushy tail. It looks up pleasantly in the friendly face of its new patron, shows its teeth in an odd deprecatory grin that some

dogs have, and slightly wags its tail. The parson pats its meek forehead. 'Good dog!' says the parson.

The dog is joined by another dog, its precise counterpart.

'What! two doggies?' says Parson John Jacob. 'Whose doggies can you be? I haven't seen you before.'

The animals, although not able, as we are bound to think, to understand the parson's speech, clearly understand his kindly tone, and both wag their bushy tails as they sniff about the road. They seem to take very much to the parson. 'I have no doubt,' says he, 'you are good dogs, and respectable dogs; and I only wish I had a biscuit in my pocket or some such refec-tion of your sort.'

Presently something is heard by the side of the lane, as if an animal bustling about in the ditch. The two dogs make their way to it, and it recognises them with the unmistakable squeak of satisfaction that pertains to a pig.

Now the parson is fond of pigs as well as dogs. So he stops at the place where the newly-discovered animal appears to be, and says: 'Why, piggie, you must be far from

home, you varmint.' For there is no farm-yard within a considerable distance, as he well knows.

In the opposite ditch there is now another sound of bustling about, and presently an indisputable grunt.

'Two of you?' says the parson; 'somebody's potatoes will suffer for this; you two rascals will make quick work of a clamp, I'll be bound; where are you?'

One of the hogs comes out into the open, a bristly hog of medium size and of the usual placid character of a well-fed creature of its kind. The second also appears. Both sniff at the parson in the half-dark, as if accustomed to be treated to snacks by some good-natured man. The parson sits down on a bank by the wayside, and his pair of pigs and pair of dogs evidently regard him as very good company.

'I only wish I had something to give you,' says the parson, scratching the pigs with his cane. One of the pigs, much gratified by his attentions, and grumpling *sotto voce*, lies down on the path, and turns itself half over, so as to afford greater facilities for being

scratched in the right place. The two dogs also squat on their haunches, as if amused with the complacent confidence of piggie. The second pig sniffs about, grumpling in harmony.

‘Upon my word,’ says Parson John Jacob, ‘you must belong to a kind master; for a more agreeable lot of stock I never came across in my life.’

A young man now makes his appearance; in a somewhat stealthy way, the parson thinks.

‘Who’s there?’ says the parson.

‘That’s for me to ask,’ says the young man.

‘Why, Jonas, is that you?’ For the parson recognises the voice.

‘Yes, sir, it is me,’ says the youth; for he also recognises the voice. ‘They won’t hurt you, sir, not a bit on it.’

‘Won’t hurt me? What do you mean, Jonas?’

‘Why, them’s my lord’s wolfs and wild-boars.’

‘The—the devil they are!’ says the parson, jumping to his feet.

‘They won’t hurt you, sir,’ says Jonas, ‘not a bit on it. Come here Jong; come here Jennet; and lie down!’

The strange dogs answer the young man’s call, and fawn upon him.

‘Pig—pig—pig—pig—pig!’ cries Jonas further; and the hogs answer as the dogs have done.

‘Why, Jonas, how comes this?’

‘I’ve been with my lord the last three weeks, sir; didn’t ye know? assisting of the keepers.’

‘No, Jonas, I didn’t know.’

‘Yes, sir, and them two’s the wild-boars; and them’s the wolfs; and very good-natured creeters they are, all of ’em; and I’ve been looking about for ’em for the last hour and more. They’ve strayed.’

The parson bursts into loud laughter.

Jonas laughs as loud as the parson.

The wild-boars lift up their voices and rejoice.

The wolves bark, wag their tails, leap and chase each other—round and round—in gladness!

‘I’m obliged to go now, sir,’ says Jonas.

‘I have to lock up these here ladies and gentlemen for the night.’

‘Good-night, Jonas,’ says the parson, ‘good-night.’

‘Good-night, sir ; and would you mind not mentioning of this, sir, if you please ? I might get into trouble, you know, sir.’

‘All right, Jonas, all right !’

The parson laughs all the way home ; his sides ache with laughing ; even in bed he has not ceased to be merry. ‘*O vanitas vanitatum !*’ he cries, ‘even wolves and wild-boar are vanity !’

CHAPTER XXVII.

THEOLOGICAL PERPLEXITY.

THE Reverend Theophilus Oldhosen is in great perplexity. Having been introduced long ago, as we know, to the distinguished Monsignore Saint-Paul, he has asked leave to consult that great man respecting the condition of his conscience.

The craving for something both orthodox and authoritative which has so long pursued him, has led him much farther than he expected. Indeed he would go farther still.

Monsignore, seeing plainly that he is a good young man, and not overburdened with worldly wisdom so much as divine, asks him why he cannot be content to remain where he is.

Theo desires to be more primitive.

Monsignore points out that the Church to

which he himself belongs certainly makes no pretensions to be primitive.

Theo thought it did.

No, Monsignore says; when the gospel was first preached, it was preached to primitive people. They established primitive institutions; no doubt they were very primitive. When the Christian faith spread to the more cultivated classes, other institutions necessarily arose. Monsignore therefore asks whether his young friend cares to inquire further concerning such good people as the Quakers, Plymouth Brethren, Moravians, Ranters, Shakers, Jumpers, or Peculiar.

Theo has ceased to shake and jump with orthodox horror at the mention of such eccentricities, but on reflection thinks he will give up his demand for the primitive and be satisfied with the authoritative for the moment.

But authority, Monsignore explains, lies after all less in the system than in the individual. It is subjective rather than objective. Why could he not submit to his natural superiors, and constitute them, if only by his own act of submission, the authority he seeks?

Just so ; but then Theo misses the element of antiquity.

If he must have antiquity, Monsignore says, why not go to the Hebrews ?

It is a happy thought ; Theo determines that it would be a fine thing to go in for being a Hebrew.

‘I remember a Jew on one occasion,’ says Monsignore, ‘with whom I was walking along the street. We observed scrawled with chalk on a blank wall the words, “No Popery.” I smiled complacently at the words. But the Jew smiled still more complacently at me. To my mind the incident suggested a movement three hundred years old ; a system three hundred years older ; and these intervals seemed profoundly venerable. But my companion was thinking of the ineffable repose of five thousand years ; of lost traditions of perhaps five thousand more. I was thinking of Martin Luther, of Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome. He looked back to Moses, Abraham, Melchisedec, Seth, Adam.’

On the whole, then, which would Monsignore advise an earnest man to go in for—

Quakerism which is at least eminently respectable and rich, or Judaism which is equally so? The one is primitive, the other authoritative; and either the primitive or the authoritative it must come to in the end.

By his own conscience, Monsignore answers, seeing that the young man is really serious, he would advise him to stand or fall.

The Reverend Theo, replying very seriously indeed, will think it over.

Monsignore Saint-Paul, wondering not a little, encourages him to do so, certainly.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ARCHITECTURAL PROGRESS.

MASTER GEORGIUS OLDHOUSEN the Architect progresses satisfactorily, not only in the building of his Abbey of All Saints and Angels, but in the consolidation of his own archæological sentiments. Fortunately for his piece of mind as regards the Abbey, Monsignore Saint-Paul and Mr. Dodd, although both eminently shrewd men, do not understand the language of architectural delineation ; and accordingly, notwithstanding the strictest injunctions so to design the accommodation for the good brethren who are presently to take charge of the evangelisation of Sweetbriar Gardens as to avoid all artistic or other sentimental affectations and provide plain comfortable modern rooms, Master Georgius has the satisfaction of feel-

ing that when finished they will be discovered to be as comfortless and antique as they ought to be.

‘This Monsignore,’ says Master Georgius to his brother the Reverend Theo, ‘is a duffer after all.’

‘Really, George, I can’t say that.’

‘Very likely not, old fellow : but I say it, and that’s enough for me. Just imagine him—you’ll scarcely credit what I’m going to tell you. You won’t believe it, I’m sure.’ (Master Georgius drops his eyeglass.)

‘Really?’

‘What do you think he proposes for the monks’ rooms?’

‘Probably stone cells without fireplaces.’

‘Not a bit of it! That’s what I propose. He wants me to make—actually wants *me* to do it—what he calls simple modern chambers——’

‘Dear me, George, how very unsuitable—surely!’

‘Unsuitable! I should think so. Boarded floors, you know, plaster ceilings, register stoves——’ (Raising his glass.)

‘No!’

‘Positively! Marble chimney - pieces, chimney ventilators—it’s perfectly awful!’

‘So it is, George.’

‘Enough to make one’s toe-nails stand on end! Well; did I say sash-windows?’

‘No, I think not; you had not got so far.’

‘And panelled doors! Gas-fittings!’

‘Dear me!’

‘Simply abominable, you know! And where do you think he stopped short at last?’

‘I can’t imagine.’

‘I must do human nature the credit of admitting that he did stop short at chimney-glasses.’

‘Quite nice rooms, George, he would have; how shocking!’

‘But he won’t get them. Look here, old fellow, at these plans. You won’t understand them, I know——’

‘Oh yes, George, I shall, with a little explanation.’

‘Not with all the explanation in the world, old fellow. You may think so, but you’re wrong—quite wrong. However, here’s the hall; which is also the refectory, you know; I’m going in for doing it inside in red brick,

and vaulting it in red brick too, with black diaper patterns all over, you know——'

'How pretty!'

'I hope not!' (Dropping his glass.) 'The diapers will be quite irregular and full of what you would very likely call mistakes——'

'A sort of intentional accidents, George.'

'Yes, not a bad term. And then the joints will be all raked out roughly, and the brickwork smeared, you know. I have quite a new idea about that. I mean to go in for letting the workmen have the use of all the rooms, with liberty to smudge them as much as they like, and so at the end we shall have a sort of antique effect, you know.'

'They will be dirty.'

'You may call it dirt,' says Georgius, re-fixing his eyeglass, 'I call it Art. And there will be marks here and there where the fellows have lighted fires, you know.'

'And caricatures on the walls, I suppose.'

'Of course. I shall go in for that very much. I shall offer a prize for the quaintest. I'll have them done with a brush of paint,

you know, or scratched with a screwdriver and so on. I call that real art.'

'So it is, George.'

'And smudges of candle-smoke everywhere; and grease, and all that sort of thing. Well, then here's the dormitory; that's in yellow brick, with white ones and red ones and so on intermixed at random. Magnificent!'

'I see.'

'No you don't, but never mind. Then here's the partitions, about six feet high, you know, forming the cells.'

'Like a sort of stable, George.'

'Call it a cowhouse at once,' says the architect, dropping his glass, 'comparisons are odious.'

'I beg pardon; it was a mere illustration.'

'I don't like such illustrations, they make the fellow that uses them look so very like a fool.'

'I beg pardon, George.'

'All right. Well, in each of these cells I have a little window to let the weather in.'

'On purpose, George?'

‘What a fellow you are, Theo! Of course on purpose.’

‘I thought so, but I wasn’t sure. I don’t object at all; I don’t indeed.’

‘I should think not. Well, red brick floors, laid with a bold decided masterly touch, you know.’

‘Yes.’

‘I’m sure you don’t know what I mean, but never mind. Then the roof here is to be open-timbered in a bold irregular way; and the under side of the tiling exposed, you know, quite rough. Fine effect!’ (Raising his glass.)

‘Something like an old barn, George, with sparrows’ nests in the holes here and there.’

‘Exactly, and pigeons I’m going in for.’

‘An owl or two, George.’

‘I’m afraid the owls wouldn’t stop, but I think the pigeons would come in well. Then here’s the paradise, and I’ve managed to get two squints in it. And then here’s the cloister and the cloister-garth, and carols, and their squints, and a laver. I’m going in for making

the kitchen like—you don't know it, but like a certain octagonal chapter-house.'

'Really.'

'Yes ; small, you know, but quite as good ; and here's the squillery ; and here's the buttery and the hatch ; and—Fine, isn't it ?' (Dropping his glass.)

'Very. And what is this, George ?'

'That ? Oh ! that's a shoot or vomitorium for the dust and offal ; it shoots everything out on the public pavement—don't you see ?'

'Yes ; then the dustman sweeps it away.'

'That's as he likes ; we throw it out in the ancient manner and have done with it.'

'But what will the police say ?'

'The police !' says Georgius, indignantly replacing his eyeglass. 'What a fellow you are !'

'I only thought they might object, you know.'

'Let 'em !'

'Here's the well, I see. How pretty !'

'Isn't it ?'

'You don't have the water laid on at all, I suppose ?'

‘I should think not, indeed; if there’s anything I hate it’s having the water laid on—there’s just one step farther to go and then you’re in the lowest depth of perdition.’

‘What is that?’

‘The gas.’ (Dropping his eyeglass.)

‘Isn’t it awful to think of such a thing?’

‘Yes. But what quality of water shall you get?’

‘I don’t care about that. In fact, I don’t care if they don’t get any at all; there’s the well, and that’s enough.’

‘They could go in for filtering it, couldn’t they?’

‘Filtering it! That shows what a hold modern ideas can get upon the mind of a fellow who is not so bad a fellow after all. Filtering it! If they like to strain it through a sieve, I believe they may.’

‘Or through a cloth, George.’

‘That would be better.’

‘And what becomes of the waste water?’

‘It runs out on the pavement.’

‘Does it?’

‘Of course it does.’ (Georgius reflexes his glass.)

‘All of it?’

‘Every drop of it.’

‘Then I suppose the brethren go out and sweep it into the nearest gully in the street?’

‘I think you’re the nearest gully in the street—that’s what you are,’ says the architect, dropping his glass.

‘I beg pardon, George; but I don’t see any other way of satisfying the police.’

‘The police again! What a fellow you are, to be not actually a fatuous idiot!’

‘I beg pardon, I’m sure.’

‘It’s a fine design, isn’t it?’

‘Beautiful.’

‘Yes; I think it will astonish the public.’

‘I think it will.’

‘I’m not sure that I won’t go in for going over myself when it’s ready for occupation. What a luxury it must be to live in a building so devoid of modern—comforts! What do you think of doing, Theo? Let’s go in for going over together, old chap.’

‘I think not, George;’ and the young man explains that he is at present oscillating between the idea of going in for a rich and

respectable Quaker and that of going in for a rich and respectable Jew.

Suffice it to say that his brother on receiving the intelligence refixes his eyeglass and drops it several times, speechless.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A HAPPY OUTCOME.

THE Countess Titania is recovering rapidly. This afternoon, it being a sunny summer day, she is to be removed, although not without many precautions, to her own home. Madonna Gay has gone out with Sergeant Jollybuff to make assurance doubly sure in respect of some of the preparations. The doctor is alone with his patient.

She takes his hand. A tear trickles down her cheek.

Perhaps she is about to thank him for all his kind attentions. He knows better than that.

Perhaps she is somewhat hysterical. It is not that.

Perhaps she means to make a final assault

upon his feelings. No ; that she will not do now.

‘I am sorry,’ she says, ‘and yet glad, to part. What you have been to me, what you will be to me for ever, I cannot tell you. I have stood on the brink of the grave. I have stepped across it. I have seen what is to be seen nowhere else. There is in the mirror that death holds up in the shadow a strange radiance which cannot be described ; it sheds a light of its own upon many things. They who are privileged to see this and still live are wiser than they have been.’

What can he say ? She clasps his hand in earnestness.

‘On the other side I have left the past like a dream ; on this I see the future as a reality. I am not repenting of mere frivolities, vanities, follies. I am not troubling myself to recall mere transgressions. I am not making vows to be sober and self-denying. I am not concerning myself about the repetition of prayers, the bestowal of alms, the offering of sacrifices. I am not mourning for the sins of the world, or seeking to vie with the angels.’

What can he say ? Her fingers tremble.

‘I thank God for the bliss of a great passion. Of this I cannot say more. What is the right, and what the wrong, in such supreme sentiment, I cannot tell. It is not given to us to know. How it is sustained in its intensity, seems an everlasting marvel. How it can be surrendered, is still more mysterious. It can be surrendered only to duty. Julian Saint-Paul, I surrender it.’

What can he say? Her grasp of his hand relaxes.

‘I blame myself——’ he begins, not without foolishness.

‘Blame? There is no blame. Do I blame myself? There is no blame. I thank God; I do not blame: you have no such cause for thankfulness, but surely none for blame.’

What can he say? She looks into his eyes with all the sincerity of a child.

‘It seems to me as if I had been taken up into a strange heaven; to a strange banquet of——’ She pauses; she is at a loss for a word; will she say a banquet of love? No, she must find another phrase. ‘—a banquet of—blessedness—the great blessed-

ness of life. It could not last for ever. It is over. Even the fruits of Paradise that never satiate, the nectar of Heaven that never cloy, we cannot eat and drink for ever. Why repine because the banquet is over? We give God thanks, and rise. We do not forget it although it is gone. We do not cease to rejoice; in memory we enjoy it for ever and for ever.'

She has ceased to speak. She has turned away her eyes. It is over. She is perfectly calm.

Can he be a coward, and make no answer?

'No,' he says, as if in soliloquy, 'we may never know it; this has no philosophy; dreams have no philosophy.'

'Doctor,' she resumes, in a different tone, 'do you mind my offering you a word of advice?'

'Certainly not.' But he is not by any means so composed as she is.

'You must marry dearest Madonna as soon as you can. She is simply delightful. She is the only woman in the world whom I can really love.'

He smiles.

‘I know what you would say. You mean that women don’t love each other very much, at least after leaving school ; that their love is naturally for men. So of course it is. I love many men. I can’t help it. I love my brother. I love Monsignore Saint-Paul very much. I love you very much. I love—I really do—the Viscount Malign ; he is always very kind to me, and he is handsome. And I love the Grand Duke, because I am going to marry him ; and I am sure you will agree with me that it was extremely nice of him to come all this long way to see me after I had been so—I can’t say unkind to him either. Then I love the Sergeant, you know, I don’t make any secret of that.’

Julian laughs. He cannot help it. There is something in this bewitching creature that will not be resisted ; and he laughs outright at her love for the Sergeant—or perhaps at the way the whole story is told.

‘You didn’t know that I had seen,’ says the Countess, merrily, ‘your aunts ?’

‘My aunts ?’

‘ Oh yes ! They were here yesterday while you slumbered and slept. Monsignore brought them here, and wouldn’t have you awakened. And we talked—you have no idea what a quantity of common-sense ! And we made Madonna promise not to say anything, but we settled it all.’

‘ Settled it all ?’

‘ Oh yes.’

Perhaps it is a foolish thing to do, but men will be foolish. He takes her hand and raises it to his lips.

‘ Only this once,’ she says, ‘ never again !’

‘ It is all over now,’ he replies, ‘ and we are both content. Allow me one word ; it shall be the last.—I do not regret it.’

Tears come into Titania’s eyes.

‘ For all that is past and gone, not regretted, not to be forgotten, but never, never to be spoken of more, Julian Saint-Paul, Madonna’s husband, give me one kiss.’

He kisses her—like a king. If it be wrong, let it be wrong.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE AUNTS HAVE SETTLED IT ALL.

‘Now, Julian,’ says Miss Glorieuse, ‘what a tiresome young man you are!’

‘Well, dear aunty, I am afraid I am.’

‘No, you are not!’ shrieks Miss Gracieuse; ‘you are the dearest boy in the world!’

‘Gracie!’ says Miss Glorieuse.

‘Yes, dear, I know it’s highly impetuous, dear, but I can *not* help it!’

‘Try, dear.’

‘Well, dear, I must. Now tell Julian all about it.’

The all about it is this. The ladies have been summoned to the metropolis by their cousin Monsignore Saint-Paul. What an extremely nice person he has grown! They are so glad that brother-in-law has made up the quarrel with him. So he wrote them to

come up at once. And they came. And he took them to that dreadful place. And how Julian could bear such a place they can *not* think! But no doubt there must be such places, or such places would not be allowed. But of all the filthy places in this filthy world the *most* filthy in their opinion is that place. And what a funny old creature that Sergeant is! And what a fine church! They went all over it afterwards, and thought it superb. And the Sergeant pointed out where the architect was to pour down melted lead upon the heads of the mob; and all sorts of other ingenious contrivances. And he proposed also to fire paving-stones from the top of the tower all over the neighbourhood when it was finished; which was a thing quite new to them, and required, in their opinion, a great deal of consideration. And dear Madonna, although pale—poor dear girl, very pale—‘Didn’t it strike you that she looked pale, Gracie dear?’

‘Oh yes, dear! decidedly; but I think the colour of her dress took it off a little.’

‘Do you know, that idea passed through my mind. Well, Madonna was altogether

charming ; and everything around her seemed to set her off. 'Has it ever occurred to you, Gracie dear, that some women show to so much greater advantage in a sick-room ?'

'No doubt, Glorie dear ; I think it depends upon the figure in a great measure, and the complexion.'

Yes. Well, the Countess they thought to be extremely pretty. 'Is she always as pretty as that, Julian ?'

'Generally more so, I think.'

'A lovely creature !'

'Quite lovely,' says Aunt Gracieuse ; 'but they say *such* a flirt !'

'Well, dear, that Julian wouldn't be likely to know anything about, would he ?'

'Oh no !'

'But at any rate, the sweet way in which she behaved to dear Madonna was perfectly enchanting. And she said she never could forget the kindness they both had shown to her. 'And she *has* such a high opinion of you, Julian !'

'If I were a man——' says Miss Gracieuse.

'Gracie !'

‘Pardon me, Glorie, one word—*if* I were a man——’

‘Gracie!’

‘Well, dear, what I mean to say is—I should fall in love with that woman over head and ears, dear, I know I should—I could *not* help it.’

‘No doubt, Gracie, there’s reason in what you say——’

‘I am sure there is.’

‘Yes, dear; but, for my part, I prefer Madonna.’

‘Well, of course, dear, we prefer our own, and I regard Madonna as quite one of our own. But the Countess is very pretty. You haven’t got her photograph, have you, Julian?’

‘No, really I never thought of asking for it.’

Julian blushes in spite of himself, and seems to be in fact not a little distraught. The blush is observed.

‘Bad boy!’ says Aunt Glorieuse. ‘But I do think, Gracie dear, doctors must have many temptations of that kind. Of all the attractive things in this on the whole attrac-

tive world, the *most* attractive, in my opinion, is a pretty young woman under the doctor's hands.'

'When recovering, Glorie dear.'

'Of course.'

'And when the doctor is handsome.'

'Certainly.'

'And young.'

'Just so. But I suppose they get used to it, dear.'

'I suppose they do, dear ; of course they would, wouldn't they ?'

'Just so. And then the Countess expressed her opinion so very nicely about Julian getting married. What was it she said, Gracie dear ?'

'Let me see, dear ; it was something pretty, but I can't remember all at once.'

'That when she thought she was dying—wasn't it ?'

'Oh yes, dear ; that when she was delirious, she thought she was a maid-servant engaged to wait upon Julian and Madonna, and that her first thought when she was recovering was one of sorrow that she had lost her place.'

‘That was it, dear.’

‘And I did think,’ says Aunt Gracie, ‘that she was a little touched herself. And I don’t wonder at it, you dear boy! I dare say there are a good many young women who wouldn’t mind being ill——’

‘Gracie!’

‘Reasonably indisposed they wouldn’t mind being, in order to be doctored——’

‘Really, aunt, I must say——’

‘No, dear boy, you must *not* say! I should hope I know better than you do about *that* matter. Not but that I thought the Countess extremely well-behaved.’

‘Extremely,’ said Miss Glorieuse; ‘however, she’s home now and it is all over. But she made us promise, Julian dear; and we did promise—didn’t we, Gracie?’

‘Oh yes, we promised; and we mean to perform our promise this time. You shall not escape this time, you tiresome boy!’

‘No, indeed! we thought we had it all settled last time; and, I’m sure, the misery we have suffered all these months—why it is more than a year ago!’

‘Nearly eighteen months, dear; think of it!’

‘Dear aunts,’ says Julian, to speak seriously——’

‘Seriously, Julian?’ says Aunt Glorieuze, inquiringly.

‘Seriously, Julian?’ says Aunt Gracieuse, amazedly.

‘Very seriously indeed—I have been greatly afflicted. For what good end I know not; never shall know, for I shall never inquire. But I cannot recognise as a misfortune that which has led me through a dream so divine. If I had been tempted of hell, dear aunts——’

‘Shocking, Julian!’

‘You incomprehensible, eccentric creature!’

‘Nay, hear me. You cannot know what I mean. I fear I have been so tempted.’

‘Oh dear!’ says Miss Gracieuse.

‘It is wicked!’ says Miss Glorieuse.

‘I speak soberly. I must have been so tempted. But the temptation is over. It leaves me wounded, wounded greatly, but greatly blessed. My ideal of human nature

has been greatly elevated. My own soul has been greatly humbled. I am no longer proud of my purposes, no longer self-sufficient, no longer strong. I know my weakness. I know how to submit.'

'That's a good dear boy,' says Miss Gracieuse.

'Very well,' says Miss Glorieuse; 'now to business; we have been sounding Madonna.'

'With her, my dearest, kindest friends, with her you must let me make my own——'

'Not at all!' shouts Miss Glorieuse.

'By no means, you naughty boy!' screams Miss Gracieuse.

'Couldn't think of such a thing!'

'Certainly not!'

A tap at the door. 'Sir Constantine Gay.'

He follows—literally like a clap of thunder—'Ah, my dear boy!—Ladies, I'm sure I beg your pardon.'

'How provoking!' says Miss Glorieuse beneath her breath.

'Is it not?' answers Miss Gracieuse.

While Sir Constantine tells them of his

yachting-tour the good ladies are politely inattentive. When they at length take their leave, the two young men can speak of what is of more moment.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SIR CONSTANTINE TO THE RESCUE.

‘My dear Julian,’ says his friend, ‘what is all this? Of all men in the world whom should I meet at the railway-station but your cousin Monsignore! And so he told me all about it. He actually waited till the next train in order to tell me. You must have had a hard time of it, poor fellow! And Madonna, he says, behaved like a—like the good creature she is!’

‘She did, Constantine.’

Julian recounts the story of the Countess Titania’s illness. It is substantially the same as Monsignore has told it, but it is thus far more complete. ‘Looking at all that has passed,’ says Julian, ‘as I now do—looking at the descent of the precipice now that I am safe at the foot, wounded and wise—I have

to thank God that I can now divulge my secret to a friend. And Madonna must know it—nothing shall be concealed from Madonna, absolutely nothing.'

'Right, my dear boy, right ; I wish I had not gone away.'

'It was all the better, dear Constantine, all the better. Did you know—I must begin somewhere at random—but did you know that I was madly in love?'

'I can see that Monsignore knew something of the sort ; I cannot say I did. You refer to——?'

'Yes. I wonder if the Viscount knew it.'

'Of this you may be assured, Julian, between ourselves ; if Monsignore Saint-Paul knew it, so did the Viscount Malign.'

'I met her at the Viscount's.'

'So I have understood.'

'I wonder why? Was it by accident? He speaks to himself, but not inaudibly.'

'There is little takes place by accident, Julian, when the Viscount is concerned.'

'From that moment I had no peace of mind. *That*—was all my illness, Constantine.'

She sat beside me for an hour, and I was mad !

‘Oh yes! such things have happened before.’

‘Without temptation?’

‘Without special temptation—yes.’

‘But Madonna sat by her brother.’

‘I remember; and I went so far—now that we are on the subject—as to fancy that my poor dear gentle cousin had jilted you in consequence.’

‘Jilted me? What led you to imagine so?’

‘Well, I can scarcely say; but that was the interpretation I put upon——’

‘Upon what? upon her conduct?’

‘No, upon yours.’

‘Upon mine. Well, I could scarcely confide it to you, Constantine, could I?’

‘Scarcely, my dear boy. But Madonna, at all events, very soon undeceived me as to her part.’

‘How so?’

‘I may tell you——’

‘Conceal nothing from me now, dear Constantine; the time for mystery is quite past now.’

‘Well, I went to Madonna ; to talk to her, in fact, seriously. I don’t care to remember now what passed ; but I found I was wrong, at all events, and had to give up the riddle.’

‘Could this—’ Julian is again speaking to himself, but not inaudibly—‘could this have been temptation too? But no matter now, it is safely past.’

‘I’m afraid, my dear boy, what we call temptation is generally—I was going to say our own fault.’

‘Or no fault at all, Constantine. But let the philosophy of love be what it may, I fancy it will never be discovered. For they who have never suffered can only speculate; and they who have—will be content, I think, to leave well alone. But that I was madly in love with her, Constantine, is enough ; how it came about is of no more moment than how the west wind blows, commencing with soft sighs, ending in tears. For a time I was literally haunted. Two figures of beauty stood constantly before my eyes ; always together ; night and day ; sunshine and cloud ; everywhere I went.’

‘Horrible!’

‘No ; both bewitching ; one good, one evil, but both enchanting in their loveliness ! You know who they would be ?’

‘Oh yes ; I have heard of such things, my boy ; it must be a fearful affliction—a sort of *delirium tremens* of the affections I should call it.’

‘That would be far from the truth. There was no pain ; no anger ; an infinitely pleasing, but infinitely tormenting hallucination. They say the visions of a drowning man are of this pleasing kind while he is struggling in hopeless spasms for his life.’

‘I have heard of an old lawyer,’ says Sir Constantine, ‘(a sly old gentleman they say he is), who tells a story of his having been nearly drowned one day. He holds up his hands in what I have no doubt is most genuine admiration ; for he saw (so he says), at the last gasp, all in a moment, the great White Throne, and all that surrounds it, in infinite and incomprehensible expanse of glory ! Language fails him when he would describe it. Unfortunately they got hold of his hair and dragged him out ; turned him upside down, and revived him. He tells the

story as if he had narrowly escaped an immediate introduction to the joys of Paradise ; but upon the probability of this, they say, opinion amongst his familiars—however, I don't know the man.'

'Well, my dear Constantine, all's well that well ends. My dreams happened to pass away ; patience is the first virtue of the physician, and I was at least patient. Fresh air is the first of drugs, and I returned from the north invigorated anew. They were no longer together ; one was—shall I say gone ? At all events I went to the other in gladness—but I was too precipitate ; I was unequal to the ordeal.'

'I remember, my dear friend.'

'Yes ; but, what was worse, the lost returned. I was sitting by a deathbed-side, hoping that a shadow I had seen in passing might not be what it was, when—God help me, Constantine !—my evil genius returned ! Came in the likeness of an angel of light ; knelt by the poor bedside ; kissed the pallid cheek ; grieved as the blessed grieve ! No devil after all !'

‘I remember; that was just before I left. I wish I had not gone.’

‘Do not say that. Indeed I was glad of solitude. They were together again: I tried to forget them together. I took refuge in hard work. It would not avail. My heart, I said, is broken, let me throw it away; my hands are left me, let me work. But they still stood before me—still together; no longer as rivals, but as fair sisters. The one, attracted to my very field of labour by some strange sympathy, was with me in her sweet presence; the other, to whom I dared not return, was equally with me as a blessed dream.’

‘In plain language, my poor dear boy,’ says Sir Constantine, ‘Titania hunted you up, and you had not the face to go near Madonna, of course.’

‘My dear Constantine; it was just as I say. I was not hunted up; if we met, it was by accident. The Sergeant told me all she did; it was a pure love of the work.’

‘Wait a moment, my boy. Give me leave to think I know thus much of women. Either she was following you for mischief,

or she was following you for love; one or the other certainly.'

'It was not for mischief, Constantine, of any sort in all the world.'

'I agree with you.'

'Constantine, I dare not tell you all I now know. The confidences of a wandering mind are sacred.'

'I understand you.'

'And you will keep this secret?'

'I will.'

'Be the case as it may, then came the illness. The circumstances were most perplexing. We determined to nurse her ourselves, not caring to trust any stranger.'

'How came Madonna there?'

'My cousin brought her.'

'From what motive?'

'Motive? A happy inspiration, I suppose.'

'Perhaps it was. So you nursed her together?'

'We did, and she is well again.'

'And do Madonna and she understand each other?'

'Quite.'

'I learn from Monsignore that she is to

marry—it is a secret of state, by the way, I ought not to tell you.'

'It is correct, quite correct.'

'Monsignore, I suppose, has taken a great interest in the poor Countess.'

'Very great indeed.'

'Has the Viscount appeared at all?'

'Not that I know of.'

'My dear boy, give me a little time to think. Let us talk about something else.'

They talk about many things.

Sir Constantine muses. 'Very cleverly managed,' he says to himself; 'very.'

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE GRAND DUKE'S MESSAGE.

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE GRAND DUKE has been pleased to direct a most gracious communication to be made to his Parliament. It is the intention of his Royal Highness to enter into a certain matrimonial alliance.

The responsible Ministers by this time have acquired the habit, which at one time they would have pronounced impossible, of letting their most gracious Sovereign think for himself in his own affairs. To do the Prince mere justice, it has to be acknowledged by every one of them that he interferes as little as it is possible for human nature to do in such affairs as are not his own. To the impost upon high heels, for example, it having been duly passed by both Houses

of the Legislature, he gave his assent with a single damn in the most loyal manner ; and he is free to acknowledge now that it has answered every expectation, and that his responsible Ministers evidently knew more than he did about such business. The next tax is to be on high hats, and he has no doubt whatever that it will be as successful a measure, and as popular, as the other. The Sovereign is of course exempt from such contributions to his own revenue, but he already wears the highest heels and the highest hat in his dominions.

Photographic portraits of 'Our Future Grand Duchess' are in the shop windows of the principal streets, and the people are delighted beyond all precedent with her beauty. Stories are told in the *Gazette* of the capital about her graceful goodness to the poor ; her dangerous illness contracted in the work of charity ; the Prince's journey to see her ; her happy recovery. A new set of portraits are brought out, exhibiting her in her shortened hair—cut in the dreadful fever ; and the people are almost wild with joy.

Bearded men kiss the photographs; women weep over them.

‘Yes, begad!’ says his Royal Highness over his Burgundy, ‘she is something like a woman!’

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A CRISIS.

THE sun has been very hot to-day; it has been hot for a good many days. Rain is much wanted for many things. There has not been such a sultry summer for years. Such are the remarks that are being made all over the country.

There has been heat also in men's minds. The prognostications of our friend Master Georgius Oldhousen the Architect seem to have been sound. The time has come when riots are apprehended—religious riots, the most ungovernable of all riots. The mob have taken fright.

High Art has gone a little too far in the Church—a good deal too far. It is only the cultivated classes who can appreciate this High Art; the mob call it by a variety of

other names—rough-and-ready names which do not sound pleasantly in ears polite. ‘No Popery’ is being chalked upon the walls; foolishly enough, no doubt, and indefinitely enough, but quite ominously enough. Prudent men knit their brows in serious thought. Thoughtless men, especially of the High-Art order, smile complacently. Matters are said to be coming to a crisis; the wise men do not like the idea of a crisis; the thoughtless men do.

Challenge has become the cry, for some kind of conscience’ sake not intelligible to mobs. The lawyers have failed to effect quiet, as lawyers always fail to do. Bishops and archbishops have been doing their best; but there is a majority amongst them and there is a minority, with all their wisdom and worldly prudence, and each party has entreated the other in vain. Less exalted and less reticent priests have become furious antagonists; the majority threatening the minority rancorously, the minority defying the majority with bitter insult; each cursing the other for Antichrist.

Such a one as Monsignore Saint-Paul views


all this not without complacency, but watching the signs of the times.

Even such a one as his Excellency the Viscount Malign, Ambassador Extraordinary, views all this not without astonishment.

In the name of common-sense and common self-regard, says many a one, what can it all mean?

It seems to mean mere mischief. If there be any one who stirs up such mischief in the world from time to time, for some such purpose as sheer recreation, it may be still supposed that even he would view it not without astonishment, wondering whether common-sense and common self-regard have any hold at all upon these infuriated animals.

In Sweetbriar Gardens the heat of the sun has been felt as much as anywhere. The close atmosphere, charged with smoke and reeking malaria, has been especially unwholesome. Many of the Gardeners have died of it; and at this moment there is pestilence in every hole and corner of the neighbourhood. The doctor has been working like a slave. Sergeant Jollybuff has lost his cheerful looks



in a great measure, and goes about comparatively pale and hopeless.

The houses in the Gardens no longer sweat with dirtiness ; they give out clouds of grimy dust, as if it were the dust of tinder—everything is so dried up. The very water supply under the streets is what is called short ; as for the water-butts they are empty, and their hoops are falling off. Filthy sour smells pervade everywhere. Every window is open that can be opened, and the population perspire and pant.

‘No Popery’ is scrawled on the houses frequently ; and on the doors where the adherents of Popery are known to dwell—wondering what harm they are doing. Party feeling has always been intense, if latent, in Sweetbriar Gardens.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

‘NO POPERY.’

THE Abbey, growing apace, is not unnaturally identified with Popery. ‘Down with it!’ say some.

Rumours have got abroad. Those long projecting gargoyles, with hellish eyes and ears, fangs, talons, tails, and wide cavernous throats, which profess to be a quaint obsolete device for spouting off the rain from the roofs, are in reality intended to spout out boiling water and molten lead upon the heads of a Protestant people. This big ugly tower (so it is irreverently called), which is rising so high in the air, is to be mounted with cannon on the summit, wherewith to batter down a Protestant neighbourhood with balls of stone. These dungeons (so also irreve-

—

rently called), which are being built about the church in such a dismal wilderness, are Chambers of Inquisition ; wherein Protestant patriots are to be treated with Thumb-screws, the Boot, the Rack, and other such quaint contrivances for the good of souls. Those squints, squinches, carols, crenelles, bartizans, are not mere foolish eccentricities of art, but points of vicious ambuscade, from which concealed traitors shall take pot-shots at unsuspecting persons. This labyrinth of crooked narrow slypes, running all about the Abbey, is, worse than all, a shameful device for the abduction of women and girls, never to be seen again except behind iron grates and under black veils.

Monsignore Saint-Paul has been followed out of Sweetbriar Gardens with shouts of 'No Popery!' Master Georgius the Architect has been regarded with lowering looks by Protestant labourers on the Abbey, who 'wouldn't do no such work, but that they have to earn their bread.' Even Sergeant Jollybuff has been questioned a hundred times ; and has thought

it best to go no more upon the works, not knowing what to make of the matter.

The Sun in Heaven and the Pilgrim's Rest are doing a roaring trade. The public thirst is unquenchable. The taverns, moreover, have at last taken sides. The Sun in Heaven, at one end of the Gardens, is the Protestant House, selling Charity's Entire and Truelove's Celebrated Old Tom, under the Union Jack which flies from a flagstaff on the roof. The Pilgrim's Rest, at the other end of the Gardens, is the Papist House, selling Mercy's Entire and Tender-ness's Celebrated Old Tom, under the Royal Standard flown from a flagstaff on the parapet. Sweetbriar Gardeners who would make the best of both taverns, and who drink at either as occasion may require or accident direct, are called Trimmers; are welcomed at neither, but despised at both. The rival victuallers are suspected by outsiders of being fraternally in secret league; just as Messrs. Charity and Messrs. Mercy are first cousins, and Messrs. Truelove and Messrs. Tender-

nesses brothers-in-law; but amongst the Gardeners they assume, the character of desperate enemies, deriding each other's drinks.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A HIDEOUS NIGHT.

ONE night, the sun having set in a glorious phantasy of blood-red murky clouds, that threaten welcome rain at last, there is great slaking of the intolerable thirst at both the taverns. The bars are crowded with men and women, boys and girls, and babies. Much cursing is on foot ; each end of the Gardens cursing the other end so mightily that the bedizened barmaids draw the refreshment with a sense of alarm, and the portly landlords now and then call out in husky voices for ‘A little less noise there, please !’

In Sweetbriar Gardens, as in other such localities, there has existed from time immemorial a habit amongst the more profane obscene of calling upon God to witness the

truth of any transparent lie by invoking His Vengeance on the spot! At the bar of the Sun in Heaven this practice has been in great exercise to-night.

At length one furious ruffian has so frequently expressed his wish to be struck dead by lightning upon such conditions, that another furious ruffian, with whom he is in dispute about the payment for a pint of beer, retorts with a kindred imprecation—but an imprecation of such vehemence that there ensues a momentary silence amongst the astounded company!

Crack! Crash! and with a clatter—
DOWN!

It is to be the legend of the spot for many a year that what happens now happens because of this—because of God's great Vengeance too long insulted!

From out of the blood-red murky cloud, a keen white arrow of noiseless fire has struck the Sun in Heaven!

Bewildered consternation, without and within, is followed after a moment by the wild rush of abject affright. Men and women, boys and girls, pour out in struggling streams

from the narrow doorways, shrieking, fighting, trampling each other dead upon the ground! Others, happily not within the house, run hither in wonder, or run thither in dismay.

Great rocks of walling have been hurled from summit to cellar; carrying all before them—floor, furniture, mirror, gilding—ruffian and ruffian, woman and baby, landlord and bedizened maid—with showers of glass and money, and splash of foul intoxicating drinks—and splash of blood—down—down—down—in universal wreck!

Clouds of dust and angry steam obscure the air against the blood-red heaven. A quivering tongue of alcoholic flame leaps from a window. Cries of agony and despair—no longer curses and imprecations—rise piteously from below. Another moment, and there is no more sound—the house is in a blaze of fire, like hell!

Rockets of flaming wood are shot from the fierce exploding furnace; torrents of insidious sparks sail smoothly through the air. Adjoining houses vomit forth from every door and window their wretched inmates, and

their wretched properties. The utmost hurry is too slow; the houses have caught fire!

Water! water!

There is none!

From out of the devil's mouth there come a few soft drops of tantalising rain. The blood-red clouds are black, because the sun has left the heavens; blood-red again, because the street is now on fire!

The street, house by house, the alleys, one by one, are taking fire, great God! and there is no water!

The rain has ceased; and out of the devil's mouth there comes the wind—in gusts of cruel laughter!

Red engines have arrived, drawn at full gallop. Their calm determined companies are pumping vigorously. Long snake-like lines of water-tube have been carried promptly to distant supplies.

Red engines still arrive; the street is full of them. The pump and the pump maintain their ponderous stroke like echoes of some terrible clock of Fate—footsteps of Time never to be redeemed, passing in fire!

Oh the sick and the aged! Borne out, even in the midst of all this furious frenzy, with tenderness and care. Tottering in decrepitude ; fainting with pain ; trembling with fear : carried in the arms of mothers, husbands, friends : wrapped in tattered blankets ; hastily clad in random clothes : seated in their chairs ; lying on their truckle-beds : speechless, helpless, ghastly : here raving in delirium, there laughing in idiocy, yonder weeping over a kitten or a bird !

A man appears at a red-hot window ; he has a child in his arms.

'Heave it down, Mike !'

He heaves it down ; falls back into the fire !

Two women appear upon a roof, looking down in horror.

'Jump !'

One jumps ; jumps unskilfully ; is killed on the stones below.

One cannot jump.

An aged forgotten creature is suddenly remembered by her tipsy son. Up the burning stair, his hair scorched from his head ; they hear him bursting through the door ; they

hear him stumbling down ; there is a heavy fall ; they hear no more !

The flames run riot everywhere. Touchwood from touchwood, house kindles from house. The wind sweeps the blaze hither and thither, under the dismal canopy of smoke extending and extending still. Half the district is in a blaze !

The red engines, and their determined companies, with hundreds of the crowd besides—resolute silent ruffians now—labour incessantly. Jets of water cross each other on every hand, splashing against wall and roof above, hissing into defiant combustion below ! The very movables of the miserable inhabitants take fire on the street surface, and the smouldering heaps have to be drenched where they stand.

Then there arises a great cry ! ‘Whose work is this ? It is the Papists that have set the Gardens on fire !—No Popery !—Death to them all !—To the Pilgrim’s Rest !—Burn it—burn it !’

The crowd separates into savage roaring groups — bands — battalions — phalanxes —

forces in array fighting with ferocious rancour—oaths inexpressible !

‘ Papists !’—‘ Heretics !’—‘ To the Pilgrim’s Rest !’ ‘ Burn down the Abbey !’—‘ Heretics !’—‘ Aliens !’ — ‘ Villains !’ — ‘ Murderers !’ — ‘ Thieves !’—‘ Burn down the Abbey !’

The red engines and their stalwart companies are left alone to deal with the blazing houses as they can. Souls of Men are now on fire—yes, Souls of Men !

Police form a sturdy wall across the street ; the wall is swept away ! Red engines in haste are drawn into a barricade ; the barricade is overthrown, and there are only red engines the less ! From the sheer instinct of battle—not for the sake of a pitiful tavern—there is gathered a formidable mob behind the prostrate engines ; the enemy, like an irresistible great raging wave of ocean, has swept over them with a rush and a roar, treading them under foot !

The pitiful tavern that the lightning spared—not for its less iniquity—is blazing from cellar to garret in strong upright roaring furnace-flame !

Again explosions shoot their rockets into

the air. Again great sailing clouds of treacherous sparks spread destruction all around. Again, touchwood from touchwood, house kindles from house, alley from alley. Again the wind in gusts and swoops plays with the leaping fire! The red engines are still at work, but their muscular companies are irresolute and without hope.

‘ Now to the Abbey !’

Covered with scaffolding without, filled with scaffolding within, quickly crackling like a fiery forest !

Heavy timbers, loosed from their fastenings, crash into the street ; kill the firemen ; kill the mob. Massive roofs fall in, reluctant to yield ; shake the earth, fling up to heaven, as if it were in sacrifice, streams of fire, pillars of sultry smoke !

The summit of the tower, when all else is down except the broken blackened walls, flares like a beacon !

It is all too late that succour has arrived, and force to keep the peace. At day-break there is nothing left of Sweetbriar Gardens but smouldering ruins covering acres of wet ground in heaps ; a hundred

pale men digging in silence for the dead ; and
in the midst the solemn shattered walls of
church and tower !

And the day breaks gloriously as ever !

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE DEAD.

AMONGST the few persons who are allowed to come within the guard of police there stand two apart; Julian Saint-Paul and the Viscount Malign.

‘Yes,’ says the young physician, ‘this is the end of Sweetbriar Gardens.’

The Viscount stands perfectly silent.

‘They have got another,’ says Julian abstractedly, as one more of the dead is brought to light and laid in the dreadful line; ‘and another, I see. How many do you make now, officer?’

The constable thinks there are as many as twenty by this time. ‘Yes, I think there must be quite twenty, sir.’

Another officer comes hastily up; takes his comrade aside, and speaks to him in a whisper.

‘Get him away if you can,’ he says.

The Viscount regards the two men with his strange stare.

‘What has happened?’ he inquires.

They touch their hats to the tall imperious gentleman.

‘They have found him, sir,’ says one.

The Viscount’s look turns toward his companion, as if anxiously.

‘Found him,’ says Julian; ‘whom?’

‘Let us go and see,’ replies Viscount Malign.

‘You wouldn’t know him, sir, by his face,’ the constable whispers to him aside.

But Julian knows him at a glance—even by his face. They have thoughtfully covered his forehead with a handkerchief; for it has been hideously cut open and shattered with some dreadful blow. The colour has left his cheeks; but the smile has also left his lips for ever.

Julian stoops over him; kneels down and removes the handkerchief. As if in the last hopeless effort of an unreasoning instinct, he touches the temple. It has long ceased to beat.

‘I see him, sir,’ says an old man who is amongst the diggers, ‘I see the Sergeant when he fell, I did. Every alley in the street did the Sergeant run down into. For to see how things was agoin’ on, it was. And for to give his orders. Never mindin’ nobody, the Sergeant didn’t, but them that was sick and helpless. And he hadn’t much time to spare neither, the Sergeant hadn’t. And I knowed we should find him hereabouts.’

‘You saw him struck down?’

‘Ah! I did indeed. And he were abringin’ along of three little childern; which their mother died the day afore yesterday. In that werry alley it were, at Number four. And you’ll find them little childern next, you will. For the Sergeant he were abringin’ of them along; all cryin’ for their mother they was. And the wall it fell upon them, altogether like; and they was all aberried in a moment of time, they was.’

‘Poor fellow!’ says Julian.

‘And I told you so,’ continues the old man; ‘for there’s one o’ the little uns already. And the others isn’t afar off. And the last words he said, did the Sergeant—there’s

another, ye see. Look alive, boys, there's one more yet.'

They stand in silence till the last of the little children is got out.

'That's all now,' says the old man, 'there warn't no one else near.'

'And what were his last words?' says the Viscount.

'His last words, sir, was this. I do' know, sir, if you knowed the Sergeant's way; but it was a cheery way he had, had the Sergeant. And the young uns they was cryin' for their mother. And so "Cheer up, my hearties," says the Sergeant, "we'll find the mother if we can," says he, "we'll find her if we can!" And then the wall fell down.'

'And may the heavens be his bed!' says another digger, 'for it's the kind craythur to the poor was the Sergeant.'

'Shall we lay him by himself, sir?' inquires one of the officers.

'No,' answers Julian, 'no.'

'No,' is the echo from the Viscount; 'where he lies, there would he lie.'

Monsignore Saint-Paul has arrived. Julian

has gone to another part of the ground. They are coming upon more dead everywhere. Monsignore and the Ambassador are gazing upon the long line laid out. In such presence they have not even saluted each other ; not spoken a word. The Ambassador, with head uncovered, points to the body of the Sergeant.

‘ Shall we have him removed ? ’ says his Excellency.

‘ No,’ whispers Monsignore, uncovering his head, ‘ there let him lie.’

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A QUIET CORNER.

ANOTHER spring-time has come round.

Sergeant Jollybuff's tombstone stands in the parish churchyard in a quiet corner that was set apart for the dead of the Great Fire. It stands in the midst of the group of little grass-grown mounds. It is a slab of granite on the ground, square and heavy, but unpolished. It carries no inscription whatever.

'What matters it,' said Julian Saint-Paul, 'even to know his name? His work is done. Let tradition tell for a few short years that such a man lies here ; and that such work was his to do. The memory of him may refresh this little grassy corner for a while. When the recollection fades, this also has done its work.'

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE NEW THOROUGHFARE.

THE ground which Sweetbriar Gardens occupied is to be appropriated otherwise. The public authorities have purchased it. A new and noble thoroughfare is to run through its midst. It shall become the nucleus of a better neighbourhood. Where stood the Sun in Heaven and the Pilgrim's Rest, the squalid tenements of the miserably poor, the narrow alleys into which no sunshine ever pierced its way, the new houses will be stately, and the shops superb. The heaps of rubbish, which were once the homes of the Gardeners, have been levelled, dug, picked over ; all that was of any value, even to a pennyworth, taken away ; nothing but the greasy black mud left, covered with broken stones and brick-

bats ; and the wide thoroughfare marked out and the divisions fixed and measured off for the new buildings. Cartloads of bricks are beginning to be delivered as the spring weather opens promisingly. These, however—everything must have a beginning—are only for the sewer ; when the sewer is built below and the broad level road laid open, then—within a month or two—the bricks will arrive for the houses to be begun. Success attend the enterprise !

The public purchase has included the site of the Abbey and the ruins of the buildings. The money has been paid over to the firm of Alabasters, Banisters, Crumpetts and Dodd, at their offices ; and how much of it will get out of those offices is a question now for omniscience alone. A friendly suit has been commenced in the High Court of Chancery, with a view to discover the hour of the day at which Marrabone's grandfather married Jones's grandmother ; and, as there is nobody who cares to assail, and nobody who cares to defend, this friendly suit may play its friendly part, for what we know, for the benefit of the

grandsons of Mr. Dodd's office-boy, who may then, as likely as any one else, be the sole representatives of the venerable and respected Alabasters'.



CHAPTER XXXIX.

MELANCHOLY.

MONSIGNORE SAINT-PAUL, no one knows why, has come to be a somewhat melancholy man since last year. In society his well-remembered lively grace would be universally missed, were it not that other personages of the same lively grace have come forward, as every year some do, every one for himself and God for them all. Indeed he goes very little out now. Nor does he busy himself, as he used to do, with either public or private affairs. He has become extremely gentle and forbearing. His penances are lighter than ever, when he is pleased, which is very seldom, to perform for a friend the office of confessor. When he preaches, it is on such a subject as the vanity of all things, or he pleads eloquently for the poor. He visits the schools, and

strokes the heads of the little scholars, who have learnt to smile when he approaches. By the bedside of the dying, his voice is like that of a woman. He has abandoned poor old Mr. Marrabone's bequest as if from some sheer weariness.

CHAPTER XL.

THE GRAND DUCHESS.

WHEN the Countess Titania was married last autumn, Monsignore assisted at the ceremony at her urgent request, and he made many friends at her little Court. The Countess and the Prince were united amidst great rejoicings.

The Princess is vastly admired. She is almost the only lady in the realm who forbears to wear high-heels. On high-days and holidays she is obliged to do so for reasons of state, as also to adorn herself with an exceedingly high head-dress ; but at all other times she is as simple as a flower-girl, and carries a smile into every household.

Some people think she is sad ; but she says it is not so, and no one can suppose she is sorrowful. She may have discovered, the

pious old bishop has been known to suggest, the vanity of all things here ; she may have learnt to look elsewhere for that joy which is set, like a jewel, in repose. She is the ever-active patroness of all good works ; she relieves the needy in secret, kisses the children in the streets, personally nurses the sick, weeps with the unhappy. It was a blessed day, the people tell you, when the beautiful Princess, by God's favour and Our Lady's, came amongst them.

His Royal Highness also has come to be admired very considerably. His behaviour is much more blameless than it was. Not only does he keep respectable hours, but he is becoming much less particular about his cigars and his Burgundy. It cannot be said that he is a man of extraordinary abilities ; but he and his consort together have as wise a pair of heads, and as prudent, and as good a pair of hearts, as ever a couple in the duchy.

Now that he understands the business, as he tells his wife, constitutional government seems to run smoother and smoother every day ; and it is well known to everybody, although ostensibly a particularly profound

secret, that if matters should come to a certain crisis in certain neighbouring territories, his Royal Highness will be invited by the Powers to extend his dominions, and no less by the Peoples. Above all things he is such a cheerful, manly Prince; not to be called light-hearted now, or gay, but so gladsome to see !

‘ Adversity, begad !’ (he cannot help it yet),
‘ and a good wife, are the best things I know for a reigning Prince !’

One of these best things, when quite alone with him, will pinch his cheek and ask him which of the two is the better of the best. And he will reply that, before answering such an important question, he must consult his responsible Ministers, begad ! he must indeed.

CHAPTER XLI.

VANITAS VANITATUM.

So in this spring-time, to the great grief of the Prince and Princess, and of all the land, the elderly bishop has been gathered to his fathers; and within the customary space of time, at the instance, it is said, of many friends in the principality, no less than of many friends at Rome, the bishopric, with the promise of a Cardinal's hat, is offered to Monsignore Saint-Paul.

When it is known that he has declined both, the astonishment of the world is unbounded!

He is summoned to Rome. To the subtle spirits of the Curia his motives are incomprehensible. Finesse the most acutely exercised is answered with a frankness that could not fail to carry conviction, if it were

possible for intellects so keen to be convinced at all—against their instinct. The affairs of the world, Monsignore says, are too mysterious for him; the affairs of the Church too weighty. Let others perform the work who are not weary; let others possess the honour who can enjoy it. For himself he submits but one prayer: that he may be forgotten by all but Heaven, and left to live out the allotted measure of his days on earth, not in idleness, but in the unobserved pursuit of the humblest priesthood under the eye of a forgiving God. No wonder that this astonishes a good many.

CHAPTER XLII.

CONSULTATION.

THE destruction of Sweetbriar Gardens and the death of the Sergeant have brought the special labours of Julian Saint-Paul to a sudden end. In the poorhouse of the neighbourhood he has not forgotten to seek out his old patients in their new misery ; but they are now in other hands. Here and there in other nests of wretchedness he has visited many more of those who once were objects of his care. The Sergeant's pensioners he has seen provided for. Almost without his knowledge, his footsteps have occasionally been directed along the accustomed route, to terminate in the unaccustomed scene of desolation, where, as if it were but yesterday, his strange coadjutor had found him so much painful but gracious work

to do. Many times he has stood beside the Sergeant's grave with his heart full—full of a strange joy, not sorrow.

He soon discovered that his former vocation was for ever gone ; and he has been persuaded without difficulty that there are realities of life for the strong to battle with in other fields than such as Sweetbriar Gardens.

When Monsignore Saint-Paul received the offer of such great honours in the Church, it happened that Parson John Jacob was paying a visit to his son. The parson and his nephew had met at the son's lodgings ; had shaken hands as if they had parted in friendship yesterday ; and had conversed on old times and new with infinite tact together. It was before his uncle, therefore, and his cousin that Monsignore determined to lay his case for counsel.

'Paul,' said the parson, 'don't be a fool. Take all they offer you, my boy. You're the man for their money, and they know it right well. I look to see you—*Pope*, Paul ! I would rather have had you Archbishop at home, I confess ; but that

can't be. You do yourself injustice, my dear boy, and you do them injustice, to be so scrupulous.'

'There is a great work to do, cousin,' said Julian; 'the world is full of iniquities and agonies; and it is your profession, your calling from Heaven, to do battle with them. The faith is of less account than the force: even religion is of less account than benevolence.'

'Right, my boy; and Paul's Church, if the truth must be told, supplies splendid opportunities for doing the work of man's duty. Besides, it's a credit to the family; and at my age, I may tell you, that counts for something. Now if they were to offer me a bishopric——'

Solemn as was the occasion, Monsignore Saint-Paul could scarcely restrain a smile.

'You may laugh—I like to see you laugh again, Paul—God bless you! But of course they won't. It has not come to that yet, with all the mistakes they fall into, that they should make a bishop of a polemical old ruffian like me, ha, ha, ha! But if they did, do you think I would refuse? Not a bit of

it! I should say, "Here you are; all that remains of me you are welcome to; it's for you to choose, and for me to do my duty!" That's what I should say, Paul, and I advise you to take the same view of your own affair.'

'My dear uncle, forgive me. I have made up my mind. Perhaps I had done so before consulting you; it is at least the way of the world if I had. I must remain at home. I cannot fight the battles of foreign lands. To speak frankly, I am in a manner weary of a foreign Church; but that is a secret—I have chosen my path and I cannot forsake it now. Not only so, but blood is thicker than water.'

'So it is, Paul! God bless you, so it is.'

'You used to be as my father: Julian as my baby brother. Old times come back to us in age.'

'God bless you, my boy, so they do.'

'Listen to me now, and weigh every word. Why it is that I carry on my soul a burden of repentance that life is not long enough to exhaust, let me not say. But it is here, in my native land, grasping the hand of my


young brother, sitting by the side of my father, that I must redeem——’

‘Don’t say any more, Paul, don’t indeed! Don’t put me to the blush. It was all my fault, not yours at all. You have done me no wrong; it was all my fault, my boy. And as for Julian, you’ve been a brother to him all his life, Paul—a brother to him; and you’re a credit to the family, both of you; and I’m ashamed of myself for a violent old persecuting blockhead—that’s what I am!’

‘My dear uncle, your self-reproach is undeserved. You misunderstand me; I cannot explain myself. But let us come to business.’

‘Yes, my dear boy, let us come to business.’

‘My programme is a simple one. Heaven has permitted me in its mercy to restore—mark the word and ask for no explanation—to restore to the little brother of my youth the one joy above all others upon which the whole world hangs. Ask me, I entreat you, for no explanation. Julian, give me your hand. Let me beseech you for a favour. All considerations aside, let me—*me*—marry you to Madonna.’



‘Of course you shall, Paul. Julian, I make a personal favour of it. I had expected to do the job myself; I hand it over to Paul.’

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE AUNTS HAVE FURTHER SETTLED ALL.

MEANWHILE the Misses Glorieuse and Gracieuse have been busy.

‘My love,’ says Miss Glorieuse to Madonna, ‘we can’t—we really can *not* be trifled with any longer by this ridiculous boy. We have seen your uncle, and he quite agrees with us that it is not to be thought of that he should part from you. So that will enable us——’

‘To take a large house,’ says Miss Gracieuse.

‘Gracie! I will allow you to be spokeswoman.’

‘I beg your pardon, dear, I couldn’t help it.’

‘Try, dear; I only ask you to try—it is not much.’

'I beg your pardon, dear. Pray go on.'

'Well, we think of taking a large house, with a large door, and a wide flight of steps—we think that indispensable.'

'And the hospital, dear,' says Miss Gracieuse.

'Thank you, Gracie, dear, I had *not* forgotten it.'

'I beg your pardon, dear.'

'Well, and your uncle has seen some dreadfully learned old gentleman about getting Julian into a hospital——'

'Not as a patient, dear,' says Miss Gracieuse.

'Gracie! how can you be so absurd?'

'I beg your pardon, dear.'

'*Not* as a patient; as an assistant physician. And there we hope he may find a sufficiency of nasty people to satisfy—what shall I say, Gracie?'

'Say the wildest aspirations, dear.'

'The wildest aspirations of his inscrutable desire for dirty work.'

'As a stepping-stone to cleaner,' says Miss Gracieuse.

‘Of course ; in the usual way with doctors, dear.’

Miss Madonna is a practical young woman. She enters into the project of the good ladies in a practical way, and it is soon brought to a bearing.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE PROFESSOR'S CONCLUSIONS.

‘My child,’ says the Emeritus Professor, ‘this habit of pairing is common to all creatures of the higher orders; even in the vegetable world it is discovered in numerous instances of the most interesting character. I have already sold my house here; cheap, I think, but to a worthy successor—an archdeacon. I could not have endured the idea of my rooms being occupied by a money-lender or an attorney. He is an archdeacon. I have also spoken to Julian and Constantine; in fact we have almost chosen a house. It has a library very like this, which is a great advantage. Julian and I have made all arrangements; that is to say, I have made the arrangements and Julian has concurred.

I am sure we shall be very happy. We have also settled the day.'

'My dear uncle !'

'Subject to your veto, my child, it is settled ; that is to say, I have settled it, and Julian has concurred. I discover him to be extremely tractable, my dear, and I think you will find him the same. I regard him as an exceedingly favourable specimen of the masculine man !'

CHAPTER XLV.

A RECONCILIATION.

WHEN the Reverend John Jacob Saint-Paul has returned to Ditchwater, he is in such an extremely good humour with all the world that he cannot any longer endure the idea of being at variance with the Earl. 'My lord's wild-boars,' he says to himself, 'have turned out to be honest God-fearing swine; and his wolves little else than good-natured colleys; as usual I've been making a prodigious fuss about nothing; I must write his Lordship a letter.'

'MY DEAR LORD' (so runs the letter),

'We have been friends and neighbours for so many years that I took the liberty one evening, a few weeks ago, of introducing myself to some friends of yours, indeed

—

retainers. Perhaps I ought rather to say they introduced themselves to me. In either case your Lordship was the means of introduction, and I must say I am proud of the acquaintance.'

('What the devil does the fellow mean?' says his Lordship as he reads this mysterious language. 'He has gone mad at last, that's clear.')

'I met them in Laggard Lane. I thought the first pair were no worse than good honest dogs; and the second I hope you will bring forward for the next County Show, where I make bold to say they will deserve an extra prize, and probably get it.'

('The old fool,' says his Lordship, 'has come across my shepherd and his flock, or perhaps my cowman.')

'If human swine were as devoid of vice as these, or human wolves as clear of cruelty, what a fine world we should have! Your wolves condescended to be patted on their heads, and your boar lay down to be scratched on its belly.'

('What does he mean?')

'My lord, they offer an example to some

of us which I, for one, am not ashamed to follow. They roam about in harmony, while you and I are at variance. I ask your forgiveness. I am going to call upon you to-morrow. My kindest compliments to my lady.'

'I call that a very nice letter, Augustus,' says my lady; 'you must write in the same spirit.'

'Confound him!' says Augustus loftily, jerking his high nose into the air. 'I'll see him——'

'Of course you will. He is a high-spirited man; and so are you; and I *won't* have any more of it.'

When my lady says she *won't* do anything, my lord has always to acknowledge that he will do something else. So this letter is written in reply.

'MY DEAR MR. SAINT-PAUL,

'I have the pleasure of acknowledging your kind note. Being quite unconscious of being at variance with any one, and far less with yourself, I am obliged to regard some of your expressions as pleasantry.'

(‘Surely that will do,’ says his Lordship, having written thus far from dictation with a frowning countenance.

‘No indeed,’ says her ladyship, ‘Augustus.’)

‘I am glad,’ the letter goes on, ‘you are in such good spirits, and I shall be delighted——’

(‘No, really, Augusta——’

‘Yes, pray go on.’)

‘I shall be delighted to see you,’ the letter proceeds, ‘to luncheon; and am only sorry to think that you have been kept away so long by an indisposition from which I hope you have now thoroughly recovered.’

(‘I like the end of it,’ says the Earl; ‘Gad! that ought to sting him.’

‘That’s not the end,’ says her ladyship.)

‘Next Sunday,’ concludes the letter, ‘if my own little ailment should permit, expect to see me at church. And believe me,

‘Yours faithfully.’

(‘Now that,’ says my lady, ‘will set you both right; and if you have the tact, Augustus, to make the best of the position,

I shall say you have come off with flying colours.')

('Sarcastic old reprobate!' says the parson; 'who would think he had all that in his head? I'll swear my lady has helped him with it; she's always fond of a joke.')

So next day the luncheon-table is a very merry one; and after lunch my lady takes it into her head to go and have a look at those dear wolves and wild-boar — they are so interesting!

And next Sunday my lord and my lady are at church again, and the parson preaches quite a pleasant sermon, knowing my lady's taste to a T.

CHAPTER XLVI.

MARRIAGE.

IN order, perhaps, to avoid the chance of offence as much as anything else, Julian and Madonna are married abroad. The various measures that have had to be taken to overcome technical irregularities need not be detailed ; but it is in fact the Grand Duchess Titania, who, by urgent invitation, has taken the chief part in inducing the young people to adopt this course. There is no *fête*, however, or any other display on the occasion ; the wedding is very private.

The Prince gives away the bride. When he has accomplished this, he appears to make a remark ; at any rate the Princess is observed to glance at him for a single moment with a little sorrowful displeasure. Fortunately no one has heard the Prince's remark but herself.

‘Fine woman, begad!’ is the Prince’s remark; ‘devilish fine woman!’

No wonder the Princess regards him for a moment with a little sorrowful displeasure.

Monsignore Saint-Paul performs the ceremonial with tears in his eyes; all the company see that.

The Prince is privileged to kiss the bride; the Princess follows with an effusion which no one would have been surprised to see develop into kissing the bridegroom.

For it is acknowledged by all that the bridegroom and his bride are truly a noble couple.

Parson John Jacob is present of course; and it is partly on his account that the ceremonial is somewhat curtailed.

The Emeritus Professor is also present, and considers that everything has gone off remarkably well.

Sir Constantine Gay is present, in the capacity of the bridegroom’s man.

Mariana Oldhosen is present as the chief bridesmaid; the others being young ladies of the Princess’s court.

Master Georgius Oldhousen and the Reverend Theo his brother are present, making a holiday of the occasion.

The Misses Glorieuse and Gracieuse are present, slightly scandalised, but not so much as might be.

His Excellency the Viscount Malign, Ambassador Extraordinary, is not present; being detained on important public business. We are quite at liberty to suppose that indisposition might have been almost a better excuse; but the Viscount is never indisposed—indeed the very rumour of such a thing would make half the world jump—whereas the idea of his being overwhelmed with important public business is familiar to all who know his Excellency, however slightly.

‘I am glad, from all I hear,’ says Miss Glorieuse, ‘that he didn’t come.’

‘So am I, dear,’ says Miss Gracieuse.

‘Everything went off charmingly,’ says Miss Glorieuse, ‘the Princess is delightful.’

‘I am quite in love with the Prince,’ says Miss Gracieuse.

‘He’s very well; very distinguished-looking, of course; and a most amiable creature;

but of all people I admire Monsignore, dear.'

'So do I, dear; he is simply charming. What a pity they don't marry in their Church!'

'No doubt, dear; but don't you think it's a great deal nicer without?'

'Perhaps it is, dear, after all.'

'I am sure it is. I think clergymen's wives as a rule are in such an awkward position.'

'So they are, dear, no doubt.'

'Of all the awkward things in this awkward world, the *most* awkward, in my opinion, is the position of a clergyman's wife.'

'Yes, dear, it's like marrying an angel, or a ghost, or something of that kind, is it not? I like a little substance in a man, I *must* say—and a little wickedness.'

'Gracie!'

CHAPTER XLVII.

REST FOR THE FEET.

‘I DON’T know how it is, old fellow,’ says Georgius to his brother Theo, as they are looking over the ancient cathedral the day after the wedding, ‘but ever since my Abbey was burnt—wasn’t it disgusting!—I seem not to care for this kind of thing. It’s played out, old fellow, as far as I am concerned. I’m going in for Greek; that’s the real antique, after all.’

Georgius drops his eyeglass with a sigh.

‘Yes, *Georgè*,’ says Theo, who has now taken to linen again and substituted an ordinary soft felt for the hard ecclesiastical all-rounder, ‘I agree with you very much indeed; only I can’t stop at the Greek.’

‘What can you stop at, then?’

‘I am not sure yet. I think I shall take a trip to Egypt, and judge for myself.’

‘You don’t mean to give up the Church, old chap?’

‘Oh no, George; but the question is—what *is* the Church? Just as you say—what is Art?’

‘I say Art is Greek Art,’ says Georgius, raising his glass.

‘But you can’t say the Church is the Greek Church.’

‘Nor yet the Roman, if it comes to that.’

‘I thought at one time, George, of going in for the Mohammedan Church. You have an exactness about dates there, you know, which is highly consoling.’

‘I should call it modern, though.’

‘Not when you hark back, George, to the previous Arabian Church. Then I thought seriously of going in for the Jewish Church, but I found that too modern for my views. I now think of trying to persuade myself to seek rest in the Egyptian Church, George. Let me be, I say, a priest of the Sphynx—a very broad idea that, I think—very broad.’

‘Well, I can’t call it narrow.’

‘And very ancient.’

‘I admire Egyptian Art, old fellow, very much ; it’s magnificent !’

‘You will find authenticity there at last, George ; depend upon it there is neither imitation nor sham there.’

‘But how are you to exercise your priesthood, Theo ?’

‘Well, I thought you and I and Mariana might form ourselves into a True Church ; there’s enough for a beginning.’

‘A sort of quorum,’ says Georgius, dropping his eyeglass listlessly.

‘Yes,’ replies Theo, not knowing what he says ; ‘I thought you would back me up, Georgy ; I’m very much obliged to you ; I really *must* have rest for my most unfortunate feet !’

CHAPTER XLVIII.

DEAR COUSIN PAUL.

A FEW years have elapsed.

Monsignore Saint-Paul is walking along the road by the river-side ; not alone. He is guiding in fact—we must excuse the humble nature of the animal—a donkey ; and there rides on the donkey a bright little boy. The little boy is talking incessantly ; asking questions with a persistence of inquisitiveness not common even in bright little boys. His attendant is answering the questions as best he can ; being not unfrequently somewhat at a loss to answer them.

‘ And why, dear Cousin Paul—why has a donkey such very long ears ?’

Monsignore reflects for a moment ; if he could explain it he would, but he really can-

not explain to a little boy why a donkey has such very long ears.

‘I’m afraid, my dear child, I don’t know.’

‘My mamma says you know everything ; but there’s lots of things you don’t know, dear Cousin Paul.’

‘Yes, my dear, yes.’

‘And why won’t a donkey gallop when you want him ?’

Here again Monsignore is by no means clear that he has a sufficient answer ready.

‘Because he is obstinate, I suppose.’

‘And what’s that ?’

‘Stubborn ; unwilling to go.’

‘But *why* ?’

They meet some one walking the other way ; a remarkably tall and very stately personage. It is his Excellency the Viscount Malign, still Ambassador Extraordinary at this Court. His Excellency and Monsignore Saint-Paul have not met for a long time.

His Excellency and Monsignore lift their hats to each other.

The little boy, having stopped his donkey, lifts his cap to the stranger with great politeness, and, with a singularly frank and resolute manner, has the boldness to inquire after his health.

‘A glorious boy, Monsignore,’ says the Ambassador ; ‘may I ask his name?’

‘Paul Saint-Paul,’ says the child ; ‘and this is my dear Cousin Paul ; and my mamma is staying over there ; and this is my donkey.’

Mrs. Madonna has in fact taken lodgings by the river-side for a few weeks, so as not to be too far away from her home and her husband—and in fact her uncle also—who require her attention, and could not possibly get on without her. Unlike her friend a certain Grand Duchess, who is getting around her a considerable family of beautiful little things, Mrs. Madonna has only this one son ; and she is anxious at this season of the year that he should have plenty of fresh air, he being more bright than strong.

Monsignore explains that he has come down for the afternoon to see the child. He

comes down on very many afternoons to see the child.

‘And the interests of the Church, my dear Monsignore?’

‘I am but little concerned in them now, your Excellency.’

‘So I have understood. Your health?’

‘My health is all the better.’

‘I remember the time, my dear Monsignore Saint-Paul, when you took a somewhat different view of affairs.’

‘No doubt, your Excellency; but the times change and we change with the times; this little boy is more to me than—what dare I say?’

‘I understand. Do you remember my story of the old woman in the waggon. “It seems to me,” said she “that all things end in cradles.”’

‘I remember; she was a wise old woman, Viscount. When this little fellow pesters me with questions, and calls me Cousin Paul, it is more to me—!’

‘Please, sir,’ says the child, ‘why are you so large?’

‘And why, my boy, are you so small?’

‘My mamma says I shall be big some day.’

‘And what does your papa say?’

‘My papa says I must be *good*.’

‘I hope you are.’

‘Not always. No, I can’t be *always* good. Why can’t I be always good?’

‘Perhaps you might if you tried.’

‘Oh! I do try; very much; but I can’t; I feel so cross sometimes; and *so* wicked!’

The Ambassador smiles.

‘And you love this gentleman very much?’ he says.

‘*Very* much; don’t I, dear Cousin Paul? And I love my mamma; and my papa; and nurse; and my donkey. Please, sir, have you any little children to love you?’

‘None, my child, none.’

‘I’m *so* sorry; may I love you?’

‘Perhaps your mamma would not allow you.’

‘Oh yes, she will, she’s such a good mamma. Isn’t she, dear Cousin Paul? Isn’t my mamma a dear good mamma?’

‘Yes, my dear; and your papa?’

‘And my papa is a dear good papa; and

my Cousin Paul is a dear good Cousin Paul ; and so is my donkey.'

'You seem to love your donkey best,' says the stranger.

'Oh no! I love my mamma best, and my papa, and my Cousin Paul ; my donkey won't gallop when I want him, and my mamma does, and so does my papa.'

'And so does your cousin ?'

'Yes!' laughs the boy ; 'don't you, dear Cousin Paul ?'

'Monsignore, if ever this world is to be a better world, it must begin again in the cradle.'

'And I have a little sister Donna ; but she's gone away.'

'Yes ?'

'Yes, she's gone to the angels ; they wanted her to play with and to love. Wasn't it tiresome of them ? Because *I* wanted her to play with and to love. And my mamma cried—oh so much ! And so did I. And Cousin Paul cried—when he thought I didn't see him—didn't you, Cousin Paul ? Yes, and you said to my mamma and me that the angels would fall down from heaven if they

had no little children to play with and to love ; didn't you, Cousin Paul ?

‘ Yes, my child, I think I said so.’

‘ Yes, and you said that some of the angels actually *did* fall down from heaven.’

CHAPTER XLIX.

AND LOVE SHALL CONQUER ALL.

HIS EXCELLENCY the Ambassador Extraordinary has reached home and is in his Sanctuary.

It is the hazy sunset of a long bright summer day. The casements are all open to the terrace and the green lawn. The evening shadows sweep across the grass in the rising mist, like strange soft memories of forgotten things. The river lies calm as a pool ; the mellow sunshine lights it up like a thin cloud and not a river. On the horizon the hills are blue. The sun is sinking into a bed of rosy fleece. The great city, far down the stream, is hid in darker vapour ; but the towers and spires are glittering above the fog, and here and there a gilded cross is seen shining in the air.

His Excellency walks majestically up and down the chamber, musing as is his custom. Lais creeps after him in silence.

‘Yes,’ he says ; ‘the priest has chosen the better part. What is all the world to him—beside that child ?’

The sun has set. The shadows have disappeared. The river is a mere mist.

A signal on the bell is heard ; and answered. Keops enters ; desires to know whether he shall light up the Sanctuary.

Not yet.

‘What if, instead of that little child in his sweet affection and joy, there had been at this moment a good man damned, a beauteous maiden mad, love dishonoured, friendship outraged, a great man, as the world counts greatness, for ever miserable, and fresh seeds of wretchedness and wrong sown broadcast ? Alas, alas, alas !’

Darkness is falling fast. His Excellency is not in the habit of walking to and fro thus in the darkness.

The men of mark and metal stand dimly in their panels ; their eyes are scarcely visible. The four fair ladies have but a misty pre-

sence in their four corners ; they might be ghosts of fair ladies. Even the two fair ladies in silver, who sustain the World—the Real of Love and the Ideal—appear but little like silver ladies, and even less like Love of any sort. The luminous globe alone has life, and but a lurid life at best. The priesthood that face the alcoves stand like dark stones ; the crimson spray is black, not crimson. The altars are in darkness, and may be no altars ; the flowers are lost in the gloom. The trains of men and women overhead are utterly gone ; there is no blue sky ; there are no stars. Under foot there is no shadow to be seen.

His Excellency still paces up and down the floor, Lais by his side.

‘Yes, fair Lais, *Love shall conquer all!* Our pretty Titania disappointed us. The dust had *not* all run out of her doll. Titania is now the mother of pretty little ones, Lais, and she forgets the past. Love conquered Titania, and Fate was defeated ! The priest is now the fond attendant of a joyous child, and Fate is again defeated ! That was a wise old woman, Lais.’

It is utterly dark. The world is lighted

only by the stars. His Excellency still paces his chamber, musing on many things.

It is midnight. The solemn hour is tolled from the church-towers, one by one. From the Great City there comes the long faint boom of a gigantic bell.

The signal of Keops is again heard; and answered. Keops again enters; is allowed to light up the Sanctuary at last; another day has begun.

His Excellency is reanimated. His despondency is gone.

He glances at the horologe; the fair ladies shrink for a moment from his gaze.

He looks around the chamber as if inquiringly. There is nothing amiss, nothing awry. He pauses thus for a moment in silence.

The grim sentinels in the antechamber of the immeasurable halls of Night are at their posts. The fair ladies are all sickly smiles again. The withered wreaths lie on their solemn altars—withered hopes of men; the tapestries around, like dreams upon the walls, under the death-black vaults. The mystery-march against the sky above, powdered with

silver stars, shows each distrustful eye turned downwards in dismay. The priests are priests again; the vapour-jets spring from the serpents' jaws blood-red again. The shadowy world below sleeps like the icy lake it was before, filled with its half-discernible shapes. Lais has crept under cover.

The Ambassador Extraordinary seats himself at a table loaded with documents. As he writes, his countenance becomes calm and inflexible; he has much to do. The world does not stand still; it is full of affairs, and the Envoy of the Avenger has no time for trifling.

'But I must see the child,' he says; 'once more I must see the child.'

The child appears, with bright inquisitive eyes.

'No little ones at all, did you say, to play with and to love?'

'Not one; not one; not one.'

'Then play with *me*, and let *me* love you—*do*!'

For a long hour, breathing hurriedly, he stares speechless at the child.

The vision is thus slowly disappearing, as
a thing never to be seen again.

It is gone ; it is gone.

There sweeps through the Sanctuary, like
a dying breath of air, a melancholy sigh.

*' Too late ! too late ! ten thousand years
too late !'*

THE END.

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